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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OFFICER 666 ***

Officer 666



HIS GAZE HAD WANDERED TO THE GREAT CHEST, THE LID OF WHICH WAS DISTINCTLY RISING.

OFFICER 666

BARTON W. CURRIE
&
AUGUSTIN McHUGH

NEW YORK
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[original decorative cover](#)

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ILLUSTRATIONS

His gaze had wandered to the great chest, the lid of which was distinctly rising.

Frontispiece

“Now here’s a cunning little line”, he pursued. “That shows something too.”

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“Give me me uniform an’ let me git out of here.”

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“He’s almost as madly in love with her as I am.”

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Officer 666

CHAPTER I.

A GRAPEFRUIT PRELUDE.

Splash! The grapefruit hit her in the eye!

Splash! His psychic wave was dashed to smithereens!

"Oh! Oh!" the two girls screamed in unison.

"D---!" the young man sitting near ejaculated.

For ten minutes there in the Oak Room of the Ritz-Carlton he had been hurling across the narrow intervening space this mental command to the girl facing him:

"Look here! Look at me! Let me see your eyes! Look here!"

For half that time she had been conscious of his insistent gaze and his message. But with as much will power as he himself displayed she bent her head over her plate and sent back along his telepathic transmission this reply:

"I won't! I won't!"

But she was weakening.

"Sadie," she said to her companion, "I do awfully want to look up. I want to see who is looking at me so fiercely. I can just feel it all through me. Of course it wouldn't be proper, would it?"

"Well, that all depends on who is looking at you, dear, doesn't it? If it were some horrid old man"--

"No, it doesn't feel a bit like that, Sadie. I don't know just how to explain it--really it isn't unpleasant at all."

"Why, Helen! And you engaged and going to elo"---

"Hush, Sadie, you mustn't say that in here. Somebody might--but I positively cannot keep my eyes down another moment. I'm"---

Then splash!

A vicious little jab of the spoon and there followed a disastrous geyser--a grapefruit geyser.

With a smothered little cry of pain Helen's eyes shut tight and she groped for her napkin. And to make a good job of it the Fates dragged in at that moment Helen's guardian aunt, the tall and statuesque Mrs. Elvira Burton of Omaha, Neb.

The young man who had failed so signally in what was perhaps his maiden effort at hypnotism viciously seized all the change the waiter proffered on the little silver tray, flung it back with a snarl, got up and stamped out of the room.

He was a mighty good looking chap, smartly attired, and if you care for details, he wore a heliotrope scarf in which there gleamed a superb black pearl for which he had paid a superb price.

"Can you beat it!" he muttered as he climbed the stairs to the lobby and mingled with the throng that stood about in stiff groups, idly chattering and looking as if they bored one another to the verge of desperation.

"Can you beat it!" he exclaimed again, fairly biting off the words.

So vehemently occupied was he with his chagrin and annoyance that he stamped heavily upon the pet corn of a retired rear admiral, rudely bumped a Roumanian duchess, kicked the pink poodle of a famous prima donna and brought up with a thud against the heroic brawn and muscle of the house detective, who stood as solidly in the middle of the lobby as if he had taken root somewhere down in the foundations.

"Can I beat what?" asked the house detective frigidly.

My, but he was an angry young man, and he fairly snarled at the magnificent individual he had collided with:

"Beat a drum, beat an egg, beat around the bush--go as far as you like--beat your grandmother if you prefer!"

The granite faced house detective was not used to that sort of treatment; furthermore it distinctly galled him to be asked to beat his grandmother, whom he recalled as an estimable old lady who made an odd noise when she ate soup, owing to an absence of teeth.

"What's that you said about my grandmother?" he said, bridling.

"Bother your grandmother," shot back the insolent retort, whereat the lordly house detective plucked the young man by the arm.

"Staggerin' an' loony talk don't go in the Ritz," he said under his breath. "You've been havin' too much."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed the young man, vainly endeavoring to shake his arm free.

"Are you a guest of the house?" demanded the immaculately garbed minion of the Ritz.

"I am, so kindly remove the pair of pincers you are crushing my arm with."

"What's your name?"

"I don't know--that is, I've forgotten."

"Now I know you need lookin' after. Come over here to the desk."

The house detective had manifested no more outward passion than a block of ice, and so adroit was he in marching the young man to the desk that not an eye in the lobby was attracted to the little scene.

The young man was at first inclined to make a fuss about it and demand an abject apology for this untoward treatment. The absurdity of his predicament, however, stirred his sense of humor and he was meekly docile when his captor arraigned him at the desk and addressed one of the clerks:

"Do you know this young man, Mr. Horton?"

"Why, yes, Reagan--this is Mr. Smith--why"--

"That's it--Smith!" cried the young man. "How could I ever forget that name? Thomas Smith, isn't it, Mr. Horton, or is it James?"

"Thomas, of course; at least that's the way you registered, Mr. Smith--Thomas Smith and valet." The clerk's eyebrows started straight up his head.

"Thomas Smith, exactly. Now are you satisfied, Mr. House Detective, or do you want to go up and examine my luggage? Having convinced you that I am a registered guest, how would you like to have me walk a chalk line and convince you that I am sober?"

The house detective froze up tighter than ever, pivoted on his heel and walked majestically away.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Smith?" asked the clerk deferentially, for he was a better student of exteriors than John Reagan, twenty years a precinct detective and retired to take up the haughtier rôle of plain-clothes man in this most fastidious of metropolitan hosteleries.

"No trouble at all, old chap," laughed the young man. "I lost my little *capri*, and then by accident I discovered a stray member of the herd belonging to yonder Ajax. Some day he's going to turn into solid marble from the dome down, when you will have a most extraordinary piece of statuary on your hands. By the way, have there been any telephone messages for me? I am expecting a very important one."

"I will see, Mr. Smith," said the clerk briskly, and began searching through the pigeonholes. "Yes, Mr. Whitney Barnes called up--left word he would call up again at 2 sharp. Will you be in your room, sir?"

"Do you think I'll be safe in my room?" asked the young man solemnly.

"Safe!" exclaimed the clerk. "Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Oh, nothing, only Sir Ivory Ajax seems suspicious of me and might take it into his head to come up and see if I hadn't murdered my valet. That's all. I'm going to my room now to wait for Mr. Barnes's telephone call. Kindly be sure that he is connected with my room."

"There *is* something strange about that young fellow," murmured the clerk as he watched the object of suspicion vanish into the lift. "Though if he is a friend of Whitney Barnes," the clerk added after a pause, "he ought to be all right. I think I'll look him up in the Social Register."

Which he did--without enlightenment.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HOGG ENTERS THE LISTS.

Having arrived in the grill room of the Ritz coincident with a devastating eruption of grapefruit, Mrs. Elvira Burton set out forthwith to demonstrate that her unexpected advent was likewise somewhat in the nature of a lemon. Even her smile was acid as she spread out her rich sable furs and sat down at the table with her two pretty nieces.

"I have just received a letter from Mr. Hogg, Helen," she began with a rush, regardless of the anguish that was still evident in Helen's lovely grapefruit bespattered eyes.

A twinge of something more than mere physical pain twisted the young girl's features at the

mention of the name--Hogg.

"Oh, auntie," she almost sobbed, "can't you leave Mr. Hogg out of my luncheon. We had him last night for dinner and again this morning for breakfast."

"Helen!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton in accents of bitter reproach.

"I just won't have him for luncheon, and with all this grapefruit in my eye," insisted Helen, hotly.

"It must hurt terribly," sympathized Mrs. Burton's other pretty charge, then twisted her head and looked behind her.

"What are you looking at, Sadie?" demanded Mrs. Burton, suspiciously.

Sadie turned with a start and blushed furiously. She started to stammer a reply when the less timid cousin came to her rescue.

"Some ridiculous man was trying to flirt with us and we were both awfully nervous. I suppose Sadie looked to see if *you* had frightened him off."

The blushing Sadie was amazed at her cousin's resourcefulness, and stole a glance from under the curling fuzz of her golden bang to note the effect produced upon her august guardian and aunt. Mrs. Burton groped in her mind for some subtlety that might have been contained in her niece's remark, failed at any plausible solution and then almost vindictively returned to her original line of attack.

"Helen Burton, I must insist that you listen to me. I have broken an engagement for the matinée with my friend, Mrs. Hobbs-Smathers of Chicago, for the express purpose of communicating to you the contents of Mr. Hogg's letter. He informs me, Helen, that you are treating him scandalously; that you do not pay the slightest attention to his letters or even answer his telegrams."

"Did he say he was getting thin--that would be charming," teased the incorrigible Helen.

Mrs. Burton gasped and the color surged into her cheeks in two flaming danger signals. The glance she turned upon the mischievously laughing eyes of her niece was intended to annihilate every vestige of frivolity. Her ample bosom struggled in its purple velvet casement. Sadie Burton actually shook in her tiny boots as she pictured her aunt in one of her hysterical outbursts right there in the midst of a host of strangers who seemed to the unsophisticated miss from Omaha to represent the very cream of New York society.

Even Helen was sobered by the gathering storm warnings. The smile left her curving red lips and the dimples vanished. All that lingered of her playful humor showed in the impish lights that danced in her expressive eyes.

But she was spared the storm. A tiny page, resplendant with myriad buttons, appeared in the entrance to the Oak Room and lisped the name:

"Mith Helen Burthon."

He bore in his arms a bouquet of magnificent orchids. Every eye in the room focussed upon the tiny flower bearer, among them the wrathful pair of Mrs. Elvira Burton.

"Mith Helen Burthon."

The rage of the older woman had somewhat cooled. She managed to nod her head haughtily to the boy. He came forward briskly with his precious burden of blooms and laid them on the table, then right-about-faced with military precision and marched away.

Now it was Helen Burton's turn to blush and her agitation was as pretty to see as anything those who continued to stare in her direction had ever witnessed. Her dimples were positive hollows from which her blushes seemed to fountain. She did not reach for the bouquet, though, because her hand trembled so and there was actual fear in her eyes as she shrank back in her seat and regarded her aunt.

Mrs. Burton was not loath to seize upon any leverage that might give her sway over her rebellious niece. With a smile that was unequivocally malicious she slowly raised the bunch of orchids and turned them over. The bouquet was tied with a delicate mauve satin ribbon that perfectly matched the gown worn by her niece.

Mrs. Burton looked at the ribbon and then at Helen's dress. There was accusation in the glance. Her eyes studied the orchids. They were of a peculiar rich golden brown, matching the splendor of Miss Burton's hair. There was conviction in the second glance. She turned the bouquet over several times, looking for a card.

There was none.

Now, here was a mystery! Could Miss Helen explain? Mrs. Burton inhaled a deep breath, then said with exaggerated sweetness:

"Helen, dear, who could have sent you these beautiful flowers? They are positively superb. He must certainly be an artist."

Great as was her first panic, the young girl quickly rallied to her own defense. She had only waited to be sure there was no card, no incriminating mark of identification. She leaned forward on her elbows, sighed rapturously and exclaimed:

"Aren't they exquisite, Aunt El!"

"I asked you, Helen dear, who could have sent them?" There was something distinctly feline in the purring tones as the question was repeated.

"Why, isn't there any card, Aunt El?" fenced the girl.

"Come, come, my dear, why keep me in suspense? You can see there is no card. Can it be one of the young men we met at the Grangers last night? I hardly think so, for it is execrably bad form to send flowers to a public dining room by a page in buttons."

Helen shook her head and assumed an air of great perplexity. She stole a glance across the table at Sadie, but that shy little cousin seemed on the verge of tears. Mrs. Burton intercepted the wireless appeal and shifted her cross-questioning to Sadie. She was determined to unravel the mystery. She read Sadie's panic as a symptom of guilty knowledge.

But Sadie was loyal to the cousin and chum she adored and proved surprisingly game under fire. Indeed, she succeeded in breaking down her aunt's cross-examination and bringing the inquest to ruins by suddenly clapping her hands and blurting:

"Maybe Mr. Hogg sent them by telegraph."

The outrageous absurdity of the statement gave it cataclysmic force. Helen embraced Sadie with her eyes and then added her own broadside:

"That really was splendid of him, Auntie El? Now you can tell me all about his letter."

"I will reserve that until later," said Mrs. Burton, icily. "If you have finished your luncheon, Helen, please pay the check and we shall go."

CHAPTER III.

WHITNEY BARNES UNDER FIRE.

Joshua Barnes, sometimes referred to in the daily press as Old Grim Barnes, the mustard millionaire, turned suddenly upon his son and pinioned him:

"Why don't you get married?"

"That's just it, pater--why don't I?" replied the young man, blandly.

"Well, why don't you, then?" stormed Joshua Barnes, banging his fist down upon the mahogany table. "It's time you did."

Another bang lifted the red-headed office boy in the next room clear out of Deep Blood Gulch just as Derringer Dick was rescuing the beautiful damsel from the Apaches. Even Miss Featherington dropped "The Mystery of the Purple Room" on the floor and made a wild onslaught on the keys of her typewriter.

Whitney Barnes smiled benevolently upon his parent and nonchalantly lighted a cigarette.

"As I've said before," he parried easily between the puffing of smoke rings, "I haven't found the girl."

"Dod rot the girl," started Joshua Barnes, then stopped.

"Now, you know, my dear father, that I couldn't treat my wife like that. The trouble with you, pater, is that you reason from false premises."

"Nothing of the sort," choked out Barnes senior. "You know well enough what I mean, young man. You have any number of--of--well, eligible young ladies, to choose from. You go everywhere and meet everybody. And you spend my money like water."

"Somebody has got to spend it," spoke up the sole heir to the mustard millions, cheerfully. "I'll tell you what I'll do, pater--you stop making it and I'll stop spending it. That's a bargain. It'll be a great lark for us both. It keeps me awake nights figuring out how I'm going to spend it and it keeps you awake nights puzzling over how you can make it--or, that is, make more of it."

"*Stop!*" thundered Joshua Barnes. "For once in my life, Whitney Barnes, I am going to have a serious talk with you. If your poor mother had only lived all this wouldn't have been necessary. She'd have had you married off and there'd be a houseful of grand-children by this time, and"---

"Just a moment, pater--did triplets or that sort of thing ever run in our family?"

"Certainly not! What are you driving at?"

"Nothing; nothing, my father. Only I was just wondering. We have a pretty big house, you know."

For a moment Joshua Barnes seemed on the verge of apoplexy, but he came around quickly, and moreover with a twinkle in his eye. Even a life devoted to mustard has its brighter side and Old Grim Barnes was not entirely devoid of a sense of humor. He was his grim old self again, however, when he resumed:

"Again I insist that you be serious. I intend that you shall be married within a year. Otherwise I will put you to work on a salary of ten dollars a week and compel you to live on it. If you persist in refusing to interest yourself in my business, the business that my grandfather founded and that my father and I built up, you can at least settle down and lead a respectable married life.

"To be candid with you, Whitney," and Joshua Barnes's big voice suddenly softened, "I want to see some little grand-children round me before I die. I have some pride of blood, my boy, and I want to see our name perpetuated. You have frivelled enough, Whitney. You are twenty-four. I can honestly thank God that you've been nothing more than a fool. You are not vicious."

"Thanks, awfully, pater. Being nothing more than a fool I suppose it is up to me to get married. Very well, then, I will. Give me your hand, dad; it's a bargain."

Whitney Barnes tossed away his cigarette and grasped his father's hand in both of his. He had become intensely serious. There was a depth of affection in that handclasp that neither father nor son permitted to show above the surface. Yet both felt it keenly within. Picking up his hat and stick, the tall, slim, graceful young man said:

"You have no further commands on the subject, dad? Do you want to pick the girl, or will you leave it to the taste and sometimes good judgment of a fool?"

"Haven't you any one in mind, son?" asked Joshua Barnes, anxiously.

"Absolutely not one, pater. You see, the trouble is that I can't ever seem to get real chummy with a girl but what her mother has to come and camp on my trail and scare me into fits. You haven't the least idea what a catch your son is, Joshua Barnes. Why, a mother-in-law looks to me like something in petticoats that comes creeping up with a catlike tread, carrying in one hand a net and in the other a bale-hook. I can't sit out two dances with a debutante before this nightmare is looking over my shoulder, grinning like a gargoyle and counting up the number of millions you are going to leave me."

"Oh, bosh!" ejaculated Joshua Barnes. "It's all in your fool imagination. Grow up and be a man, Whitney. You have given me your word and I expect you to make good. And by the way, son, there is my old friend Charley Calker's girl, just out of college. I hear she's a stunner."

"Mary Calker is a stunner, dad, and then a trifle. But I regret to say that she is too fresh from the cloistered halls of learning. You see I have been out of college three years and have managed to forget such a jolly lot that I really couldn't talk to her. She'd want me to make love in Latin and correspond in Greek. Worse than that, she understands Browning. No, poor Mary will have to marry a prescription clerk, or a florist or something else out of the classics. But, don't lose heart, pater, I may be engaged before night. By-by."

It was a vastly more solemn Whitney Barnes who strolled out of the office of the mustard magnate and dragged his feet through the anteroom where sat Marietta Featherington and Teddie O'Toole. The comely Miss Featherington could scarcely believe what she saw from under her jutting puffs.

This good looking, dandified young man, with his perpetual smile and sparkling gray eyes had long been her conception of all that was noble and cultured and aristocratic. He was her Viscount Reginald Vere de Vere, speaking to her as from between yellow paper covers. He was her prince incognito who fell in love with Lily, the Lovely Laundress. He had threaded the mazes of more than one of her palpitating dreams, and in her innermost heart of hearts she had cherished the fond belief that one day their orbs would meet and their souls would rush together in such a head-on collision as is sometimes referred to as love at first sight. But in Miss Featherington's hero worship gloom had no part. Her ideals never ceased to smile, whether they slew or caressed, and perpetually they carried themselves with a jaunty swing or a dashing stride.

The fact that there had been storm mutterings within the awful cave of Old Grim Barnes had never before had a depressing effect upon her hero. He had always sallied forth with airy tread, humming a tune or laughing with his eyes. What could have happened at this fateful meeting? Perhaps he had been disinherited. Rapture of raptures, he had confessed his love for some howling beauty of humble station, had been cut off with the inevitable shilling and was now going forth to earn his bread.

Marietta Featherington's heart came up and throbbed in her throat as Whitney Barnes suddenly wheeled and confronted her. Leaning back upon his cane, he looked at her--very, very solemnly.

"Miss Featherington," he pronounced slowly, "I wish to ask you a question. May I?"

Marietta was sure that her puffs were on fire, so fierce was the heat that blazed under her fair skin. She concentrated all her mental forces in an effort to summon an elegant reply. But all she could get out was a stifled:

"Sure thing."

"Thank you, Miss Featherington," said the young man. "My question is this: Do you believe in soul mates? That is, do you, judging from what you have observed and any experience you may have had, believe that true love is controlled by the hand of Fate or that you yourself can take hold and guide your own footsteps in affairs of the heart?"

Teddie O'Toole had crammed "Deep Blood Gulch" into his hip pocket and was grinning from ear to ear.

Miss Featherington was positive that her puffs were all ablaze. She could almost smell them

burning. She looked down and she looked up and she drew a long, desperate sigh.

"I believe in Fate!" she said with emotion that would have done honor to Sarah Bernhardt.

"Thank you, Miss Featherington," said Whitney Barnes, with profound respect, then turned on his heel and went out into the corridor of the great office building.

Unconsciously he had dealt a ruthless blow and there is not a scintilla of doubt but that he was responsible for the box on the ears that made Teddie O'Toole's head ring for the remainder of the day and thereby took all the flavor from the thrills he had found in "Deep Blood Gulch."

CHAPTER IV.

SMILES AND TEARS.

"Now there is no use in your arguing, Sadie--I love him and I have given him my promise."

The two cousins were alone again speeding up Fifth avenue in an automobile, a long-bodied foreign car that had been put at the disposal of Mrs. Burton by the New York agent of Mr. Hogg. The Omaha suitor for the hand of the fair Helen had also thrown in a red-headed French chauffeur, which is travelling a bit in the matter of chauffeurs. But as he understood only automobile English it was a delightful arrangement for Helen and Sadie, and permitted them absolute freedom of speech while riding behind him.

"If I had only known him longer, or had been introduced to him differently," sighed Sadie.

"But haven't I known all about him for years?" protested Helen Burton. "Of course, we were only school girls when he made that wonderful rescue at Narragansett Pier. Don't you remember how we rushed down to the beach to see him, but got there just too late? He had gone out to his yacht or something. Oh, it was just splendid, Sadie. And he is so wonderfully modest about it. Why, when I reminded him of his heroism he pretended to have forgotten all about it. Just imagine Mr. Hogg forgetting a thing like that! Do you know what Jabez Hogg would do under similar circumstances, Sadie Burton? Well, I'll tell you--he'd hire the biggest hall in Omaha and reproduce the whole thing with moving pictures as an advertisement for his beef canneries."

The young girl had worked herself into a passion and was making savage little gestures with her clenched fists.

"But what I can't understand, Helen dear, is why a man like Travers Gladwin should make such a mystery of himself and try to avoid introducing you to his friends. I am sure," persisted Sadie, despite the gathering anger in her companion's eyes, "that Aunt Elvira would not object to him. You know she is just crazy to break into the swim here in New York, and the Gladwins are the very best of people. I think it wouldn't take much to urge her even to throw over Mr. Hogg for Gladwin, if you'd only let her take charge of the wedding."

"Nothing of the sort," denied Helen hotly. "Aunt Elvira is bound on her solemn word of honor to Mr. Hogg. She will fight for him to the last ditch, though she knows I hate him."

"Don't you think, Helen," said the younger girl, more soberly, "that you are simply trying to make yourself look at it that way? I know Mr. Hogg isn't a pretty man and he has an awful name, but"---

"There is no but about it, Sadie Burton. I have given my word to Travers Gladwin and I am going to elope with him to-night. I packed my trunk this morning and gave the porter \$10 to take it secretly to the Grand Central Station. Travers told me just how to arrange it. Oh, there's his house now, Sadie; the big white one on the corner. It just thrills me to go by it. On our way back from Riverside Drive we must stop there. I must leave word that auntie insists on our going to the opera and that I won't be able to get to him at the time we agreed."

"Oh, I *do* wish something would turn up and prevent it," cried Sadie, almost in tears.

"You horrid little thing!" retorted Helen. "It is dreadful of you to talk like that when you know how much I care for him."

"It isn't that I don't think you care for him," returned Sadie with trembling lip. "It's something inside of me that warns me. All this secrecy frightens me. I can't understand why a man of Travers Gladwin's wealth and social position would want to do such a thing."

"But we both have tried to tell you," insisted Helen, "that there is an important business reason for it."

"He didn't tell what that reason was," persisted the tearfully stubborn cousin. "You admitted he didn't give you any definite reason at all."

Helen Burton stamped her foot and bit her lip. By this time the big touring car was gliding through the East Drive of Central Park with the swift, noiseless motion that denotes the highest development of the modern motor vehicle. Fully a mile of the curving roadway had slid under

the wheels of the car before Helen resumed the conversation with the sudden outburst:

"You don't doubt for an instant, Sadie, that he is a gentleman!"

Sadie made no reply.

"His knowledge of painting and art is simply wonderful. At that art sale, where we met, he knew every painting at a glance. He didn't even have to look for the signatures. You know, if it hadn't been for him I would have bought that awful imitation Fragonard and just thrown away two months of my allowance. Sadie Burton, he is the cleverest man I ever met. He has travelled everywhere and knows everything, and I love him, I love him, I love him!" In proof of which the charming young woman burst into tears and took refuge in her vast muff.

This sentimental explosion was too much for tender-hearted Sadie. She gave way completely and swore not to breathe another word in opposition to the elopement. And as she felt her beloved cousin's body shaken with sobs, she forced herself to go into ecstasies over Travers Gladwin's manly beauty and god-like intellect. In her haste to soothe she went to extravagant lengths and cried:

"And he must have looked heavenly in his bathing suit when he made that wonderful rescue."

Down fell Helen's muff with as much of a crash as a muff could make and she turned upon her companion the most profoundly shocked expression of a bride-about-to-be.

"Sadie," she reproved stiffly, "you have gone far enough."

Whereupon it was Sadie's turn to seek the sanctuary of tears.

CHAPTER V.

WHITNEY BARNES TELEPHONES TO THE RITZ.

Glancing up into the solemn face of an unusually good-looking young man who wore his silk hat at a jaunty angle and whose every detail of attire suggested that he was of that singularly blessed class who toil not neither do they spin, Miss Mamie McCorkle, public telephone operator in the tallest-but-one skyscraper below the Fulton street dead line, expected to be asked to look up some number in the telephone book and be generously rewarded for the trifling exertion. It wasn't any wonder, then, that she broke the connections of two captains of industry and one get-rich-quick millionaire when this was what she got:

"Suppose, my dear young lady, that you had a premonition--a hunch, I might say--that you were destined this current day of the calendar week to meet your Kismet in petticoats, wouldn't it make you feel a bit hollow inside and justify you in taking your first drink before your customary hour for absorbing the same?"

Usually a live wire at repartee, Mamie McCorkle was stumped. With a captain of industry swearing in each ear and the get-rich-quick millionaire trying to break in with his more artistic specialties in profanity, she was for a moment frozen into silence. When she did come to the surface, she set the captains of industry down where they belonged, retorted upon the get-rich-quick millionaire that he was no gentleman and she hoped he would inform the manager she said so and then raised her eyebrows at the interrogator who leaned against her desk.

"If that's an invitation to lunch, *No!* I'm already dated," she said. "If you're trying to kid me, ring off, the line is busy."

"All of which," said the young man, in the same slow, sober voice, "is sage counsel for the frivolous. I am not. As you look like a very sensible young woman, I put a sensible question to you. Perhaps my language was vague. What I meant to convey was: do you think I would be justified in taking a drink at this early hour of the day to brace me for the ordeal of falling in love with an unknown affinity?"

"If your language is personal," replied Miss McCorkle, with a sarcastic laugh, "my advice is to take six drinks. I'm in love with a chauffeur."

"Good," said the young man, brightly, "and may I ask if it was a sudden or a swift affair?"

"Swift," snapped Miss McCorkle. "He ran over my stepmother, then brought her home. I let him in. We were engaged next day. Here's the ring, one and one-half carats, white!--now, what number do you want?"

"A thousand thanks--get me the Ritz-Carlton, please, and don't break this ten-dollar bill. I hate change, it spoils the set of one's pockets."

As Whitney Barnes squeezed himself into the booth, Miss McCorkle squinted one eye at the crisp bill he had laid before her and smiled.

"There's more than one way," she thought, "of being asked not to listen to dove talk, and I like this method best."

The shrewd hello girl, however, had erred in the case of Whitney Barnes, for this is the way his end of the conversation in booth No. 7 ran:

--This the Ritz? Yes. Kindly connect me with Mr. Smith.

--What Smith? Newest one you got. Forget the first name. Thomas Smith, you say. Well, give me Tom.

--Hello, there, Trav--that is, Tom, or do you prefer Thomas?

--What's that? Came in by way of Boston on a Cunarder? What's all the row? Read you were in Egypt, doing the pyramids.

--Can't explain over the wire, eh. Hope it isn't a divorce case; they're beastly.

--Ought to know you better than that. Say, what's the matter with your little angora?

--Be serious; it's no joking matter. Well, if it wasn't serious how could I joke about it? You can't joke about a joke.

--I'm a fool! I wonder where I heard that before. Oh, yes--a few minutes ago. My paternal parent said the same thing.

--Can I meet you at your house? Where is it? I ought to know? I don't see why, you keep building it over all the time and then go way and leave it for two years at a stretch. Then when you do come home you go and live under the---

--Cut that out! My glory, but there is a mystery here.

--Certainly, I don't want to spoil everything.

--Have I an engagement? I should say I have. Just you call up Joshua Barnes and ask for the dope on it--a whole flock of engagements bunched into one large contract, the biggest I ever tackled.

--No, I guess it won't prevent me from meeting you. Not unless I happen to see her on the way uptown.

--Blessed if I know her any more than you. Wish I did, but whoever she is she's got to be pretty awful horrible nice.

--Have I been drinking? No; but you better have one ready for me. Seen any of the chaps at the club? What's that? You gave it a wide berth. This is beginning to sound like a detective novel or a breach of promise case.

--You don't tell me. Really, I'd never looked at myself in that light before. Sure, I'm stuck on myself. Head over heels in love with myself. I'm a classy little party, I am, and you better make the best of me while I'm here. Where am I going? Nowhere in particular. Just going to merge my individuality, bite a chunk out of an apple and get kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

--Now you're sure I'm piffled. No such luck. Trav--that is, Mr. Smith--Mr. Thomas Smith! Shall I ask for Smith when I drop up at that little marble palace of yours? No. Oh, Bateato will be there if you happen to be delayed. How is the little son of Nippon? Oh, that's good. Five sharp. Tata, Smitty, old chap. By Jove, he's rung off with a curse---

CHAPTER VI.

OFFICER 666 ON PATROL.

Michael Phelan had been two years on the force and considered himself a very fly young man. He had lost something of his romantic outline during the six months he pounded the Third avenue pave past two breweries and four saloons to a block, and it was at his own request, made through his mother's second cousin, District Leader McNaught, that he had been provided with a saloonless beat on Fifth avenue.

A certain blue-eyed, raven-haired nursemaid, who fed a tiny millionaire with a solid gold spoon and trundled an imported perambulator along the east walk of Central Park, may have had something to do with Patrolman Phelan's choice of beat, but he failed to mention the fact to his mother. He laid it all on the breweries and the temptations they offered.

Humble as was Michael Phelan's station on the force, he was already famous from the wooded wastes of Staten Island to the wilds of the Bronx. Even the graven-featured chief inspector permitted himself to smile when the name of Michael Phelan was mentioned.

He was a fresh, rosy-cheeked, greener-than-grass probationary cop when fame came to him all in one clap and awoke a thunderous roll of laughter throughout the city.

It was his first detail on the lower east side in the precinct commanded from the Eldridge street station. The time was July and the day was a broiler. He was sitting in the reserve room playing dominoes with the doorman and mopping his forehead with a green bandana when the captain

sent for him.

"Phelan," said the captain shortly, "there's a lady dead without a doctor at 311 Essex street, three flights up, rear. They've told the Coroner's Office, but all the Coroners are busy. The corpse is a lone widow lady with no kin, so you go up and take charge and wait for the Coroner."

Officer 666 tipped his cap with military salute and set out. Turning the corner into Essex street, he met plain-clothes man Tim Feeney, who stopped him and asked him where he was bound. Michael Phelan explained and then said:

"Tim, if you don't mind, will you give me a tip? What do I do when I get up to that flat, and how long will I have to wait?"

"You'll have to wait, Mike," replied Tim Feeney, "till the Coroner gets good and ready to come. When you get to the flat don't knock; walk right in. Then sit down by the bed and wait. Be sure you keep the door shut and let no soul in till the Coroner arrives."

"It'll be powerful hot and I'm perishing o' thirst now," said Mike.

"Take off your coat," said Tim, "and send a kid for a can of beer. When you hear the Coroner comin' slip the can under the bed."

Tim Feeney went on his way with his hand over his mouth.

Patrolman Phelan had missed the twinkle in Tim Feeney's eye and a few minutes later found him sitting beside a bed with his coat off and a foaming can on the floor by his chair. On his way up the steep, narrow staircases he had met a boy and sent him for the liquid refreshment. He had instructed the lad where to deliver the beer and had gone quietly in to his unpleasant vigil.

The door he opened led directly into the bedroom. He had glanced once at the bed and then looked away with a shudder. Perspiration fairly cascaded down his flaming cheeks as he tiptoed to a chair and placed it beside the bed. He placed his chair at a slight angle away from the bed and then fixed his eyes on the opposite wall. When he heard the tread of the boy in the hall he made a pussy-footed dash for the door, took in the growler, shut the boy out and buried his face in the froth. He was in better heart, but still mighty uneasy when he wiped his mouth on the back of his fist.

Somewhere in the flat a clock ticked dismally. Through two small open windows puffed superheated gusts of air. The muffled clamor of many voices in strange tongues sifted through the windows and walls, but served only to increase the awful stillness in the room. Despite his efforts to the contrary, Phelan stole a glance at the bed, then looked away while his heart stopped beating. There was a naked foot where he had seen only a sheet before.

"Mebbe the wind blew it off," he tried to tell himself, but something inside him rejected the explanation and he felt an icy finger drawn up and down his spine. Again he plunged his head into the capacious can and succeeded in reviving his heart action.

More minutes of dreadful suspense passed. A leaden silence had filled the sweltering room. Even the voices of the tenements had died away to a funereal murmur. Battle as he did with all his will, Phelan's eyes were again drawn from their fixed gaze upon the wall, and what he saw this time induced a strangling sensation.

Three toes had distinctly wiggled.

He withdrew his eyes on the instant and his shaking hand reached down for the can. His fingers had barely touched it when an awful shriek rent the air. The shriek came from the bed, and it was followed by a second yell and then by a third.

Michael Phelan did not open the door as he passed out. It was not a very strong door and it went down like cardboard before the impact. The third shriek awoke the echoes just as Officer 666 was coasting down the stairs on the seat of his departmental trousers. His departmental coat and his departmental hat were in no way connected with his precipitate transit. A raging Polish woman brought these details of Michael's uniform to the Eldridge street station a little later. Likewise she preferred charges against Phelan that come under the heading of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

It was a tremendous trial, in the course of which the Deputy Police Commissioner who sat in judgment barely missed having a serious stroke. It was adduced in evidence that Officer 666 had entered the wrong flat, the Coroner's case being one flight up.

But while the whole town rocked with laughter Michael Phelan failed to see the joke, and his hatred of Precinct Detective Tim Feeney never cooled. That he got off with a light sentence of one day's fine did not in the least improve his humor. He knew he was a marked man from that day, and it was all his mother could do to urge him to stay on the force.

In the course of time, however, the sting had worn off and the young patrolman learned to smile again. His hollow cheeks had filled out amazingly during the period of the brewery beat and on that late autumn day when he stepped into the pages of this narrative he looked mighty good, not only to the raven-haired Rosalind O'Neill but to a host of other pretty nursemaids who were wheeling their aristocratic little charges up and down The Avenue.

Nor was Michael Phelan at all unconscious of this as he sauntered along the broad pavement and gracefully twirled his baton. His chest jutted out like the breast of a pouter pigeon and he wore the solemnly self-conscious expression of a peacock on parade.

When he came to the great white square mansion of Travers Gladwin, he paused and studied it

shrewdly with his eye. It was one of the most important functions of his patrol to study the fronts of all unoccupied dwellings and see that every window was down and every door was closed. First he looked into the areaway of the Gladwin home and then his eye travelled up the wide balustraded stoop to the ornamental bronze doors.

"What's this!" he gasped in astonishment. "Sure, I read in the papers on'y this morning that Travers Gladwin was in Agypt. 'Tis a bold thafe who'll go in the front door in broad day, so here's where Mary Phelan's son makes the grand pinch he's been dreamin' on this six months back and gets his picture in the papers."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE BROWN JAP.

Patrolman Phelan wrapped his sinewy fist about the handle of his club with a vicious grip as he proceeded cautiously up the steps. The heavy bronze door had been left ajar, and he squeezed through without opening it further, then paused in the vestibule and listened. What he heard seemed no more than the tread of a spider, and the thought rushed into his head:

"'Tis one of that felt-soled kind. 'Tis tip-toes for Phelan."

He had noted that even the inside door was open, and he swiftly divined from this that the thief had left it open for his own convenience or for some other purpose connected with the mysteries of burglar alarms. Inch by inch the policeman moved across the vestibule and wriggled through the door into the richly carpeted hallway.

It was with a distinct sense of relief that he felt his heavy boots sink noiselessly into the deep ply of a precious Daghestan rug. One of Phelan's boots had a bad creak in it, and he knew that the master crook who would attempt such a robbery as this would have an acute sense of hearing.

It was dark as a pocket down the stretch of the heavily curtained foyer, save for a meagre shaft of light that came through a slightly parted pair of portières to the left and not a dozen feet from where he stood. He strained his ear toward this shaft of light until there came an unmistakable swish of sound, whereupon he moved forward in short, gliding steps.

When he reached the break in the portières and looked in he was astonished to see a short little man with shiny black hair deftly removing the linen covers from chairs and tables and statuary. The little man had his back to Phelan as the policeman stepped inside, but he turned in a flash and confronted the intruder with the peculiar glazed grimness of the Japanese.

"Well, what matter?" ripped out the little Jap, without moving a muscle.

"That's what I come to find out," retorted Phelan, with accusing severity of tone.

"How you get in here?" retorted the Jap in the same sharp, emotionless tones.

"I saw ye snakin' in an' ye didn't latch the door after yez," blurted Phelan, taking a step nearer the Jap and still watching him with profound suspicion.

"What you want?" asked the Jap with a slight tremor of apprehension.

"Information!" cried Phelan. "What are yez doin' in here?" Phelan's eye swept the room for some evidence of an attempt to despoil. Though he saw none he did not relinquish his attitude of suspicion. The Jap seemed about to speak and then stopped. As Phelan continued to glower at him, he snapped out:

"I no can tell."

Triumph blazed in Phelan's eyes. Now he was sure he had a thief and he determined to handle the situation with all the majesty of his official person.

"So yez can't tell what yez're doin' in this house," he said with fine sarcasm.

The Jap shook his head emphatically and returned a positive, "No tell!"

Phelan balanced his club for a moment and strode toward the Jap.

"Yez better come with me," he said through compressed lips.

The Jap started back with a frightened exclamation.

"You no take me to jail?" he uttered, while his yellow features twitched with fear.

"In a minute," replied the elated officer, "if yez don't tell me what yez're doin' here. I've been lookin' out for this place while Mr. Gladwin was in foreign parts, and"---

"You know Mr. Gladwin?" broke in the Jap, excitedly.

"No, I ain't never seen him," said Phelan, "but I know this is his house an' I been keepin' my eye on it fer him."

"Mr. Gladwin--he my boss!" and the Jap grinned from ear to ear.

This solution of the mystery never entered the policeman's head and he resented the surprise.

"Do yez mean yez're his valley?" he asked vindictively, refusing to relinquish his suspicion.

"Ees!" and again the Jap grinned.

Phelan read the grin as a distinct insult to his intelligence and he pounced upon the little brown man in an even more caustic tone:

"If yez're are Mr. Gladwin's valley, what are ye doin' here an' him thousands o' miles away across the ocean in Agypt an' Jerusalem an' the like?"

Now it was Phelan's turn to grin as he saw the Jap shrink and turn upon him a pair of wildly alarmed eyes.

"Come! Come! I'm waitin' fer an answer," The cat had his mouse backed into a corner and mentally licked his chops.

"I no can tell," stammered the Jap, desperately.

"That's enough!" ripped out Officer 666, grabbing the Jap by the shoulder and yanking him toward the doorway.

"No--no--wait!" gasped the struggling prisoner. "You no say if I tell you, plees?"

"Tell me first," grunted Phelan, releasing his grip.

The Jap ducked his head in every direction as if fearful that the walls had ears, then said in an impressive whisper:

"My boss--Mr. Gladwin--home!"

"Misther Gladwin home! Here in New York!" There was both incredulity and amazement in Phelan's voice.

"Ees!" bleated the Jap and his grin returned.

"Well, why didn't you say so before?" said Phelan angrily, at which the fidgety little brown son of Nippon hastened to explain:

"No one should know. He come all in much secret. He go boat to Boston. No use name. No one know he Mr. Gladwin. He say, 'Bateato'--me Bateato--'Bateato,' he say, 'no tell I come home--sure,' he say, and Bateato he no tell."

Officer Phelan yielded to the grip of the mystery and his attitude toward the Jap changed.

"What did he want to snake home that away fer?"

"I no know," nodded Bateato.

"Yez no know, eh? Well, is he comin' here?--do yez no know that?"

"He tell me--come here and wait--feex thees room--he come here or telephone."

The straightforward manner of the little Jap had almost completely disarmed the policeman's suspicion, but he surrendered reluctantly.

"Did he give yez a key to get in here?" Phelan fired as his last shot.

"Ees--he give me all bunch keys--look!" and Bateato produced a gold key ring with a gold tag and a number of keys attached. Phelan examined it and read aloud the name Travers Gladwin engraved on the tag. Handing them back to the Jap, he addressed him impressively, gesturing his emphasis with his baton:

"I guess yez're all right, but I'll have me eye on yez from the outside, mind that--and if yez're foolin' me or tryin' to get away with anythin'---"

Phelan snapped his lips together and with a mighty lunge plucked an imaginary prisoner out of the atmosphere and shook it ferociously. Then stepping back to the doorway he shut one eye with a fierce wink and jerked out:

"Are yez wise?"

The profound pantomime was too much for Bateato, who stared after the vanishing officer in open-mouthed amazement.

CHAPTER VIII.

ART, MYSTERY AND LOVE.

The little Jap was still posed in an attitude of bewilderment as the two outside doors slammed and Officer 666 went down the front steps to resume the tread of his beat and the breaking of fragile hearts.

When he did emerge from his trance he returned to the task of getting the great room in order

with the same snappy energy he had displayed when the uniformed minion of the law broke in upon him. He had removed the covers from the chairs and was dusting off a great carved chest that stood against the wall to the right of the doorway when the door bell rang. Bateato jumped and then waited for a second ring. Stepping warily out into the hallway, he looked to see if it was the grim official in blue and buttons.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "No more police," and he shot to the door and opened it for that debonnaire young gentleman who was one day to inherit the mustard millions of Old Grim Barnes.

"Hello there, Bateato," Whitney Barnes greeted the little Jap cordially. "Did your master show up yet?"

"He no come," grinned Bateato, shutting the door and leading the way into the room he had been preparing for his master's arrival. As Whitney Barnes stepped into the room the Jap asked:

"Scuse me, Mr. Barnes--you see Mr. Gladwin?"

"No, nor his double, Thomas Smith of the Ritz; but he asked me to meet him here at 5 o'clock, Bateato."

"Ees sair!" lisped the Jap, with a bob of the head; then dived back to his occupation of making the long deserted room look presentable.

As Bateato followed his master's friend into the room he switched on the full glare of electric lights that depended from the ceiling or blazed through the shades of many lamps. Whitney Barnes blinked for a moment, and then started as his gaze was directed to the walls hung with masterpieces.

The work of Rubens, Rembrandt, Coret, Meissonier, Lely, Cazzin, Vegas, Fragonard, Reynolds and a score others of the world's greatest masters leaped across his vision as he turned from wall to wall, revolving on his heel.

"Whew!" he ejaculated. "I didn't know that Travers went in for this sort of thing. He certainly is the secretive little oyster when he wants to be."

Still studying the portraits and landscapes and allegorical groups, he voiced to Bateato a sudden thought.

"By the way, Bateato, do you know what it was that brought your master back in this strange fashion and the reason for all this secrecy?"

"No, sair," responded the Jap.

"Well, it's damned peculiar!" muttered the young man to himself, and proceeded on a tour about the room to examine more closely its wealth of art treasure. He had been engaged in this way about five minutes when the door bell rang and Bateato cried:

"Here Mr. Gladwin now."

"How do you know that Bateato?" quizzed the young man absently, his attention being gripped by a stunning aphrodite rising from the sea in a glory of nudity and rainbows.

The Jap paused a second on his way to the door, and replied:

"Cause no one know he home but Mr. Barnes. Thees house close up much long time and Mr. Gladwin make papers say he in Egypt."

In the same breath in which he maximed this volley of words the little Jap projectiled himself from the room.

"His deductions are marvellous," said Whitney Barnes, solemnly addressing a bronze bust of Philip of Macedon. He turned in time to meet the brisk entrance of Travers Gladwin, alias Thomas Smith of the Ritz.

The two shook hands warmly and looked into each other's faces with quizzical smiles. They were about of an age, both unusually good looking and bearing themselves with that breezy, confident manner that is characteristic of young men who have been coddled in swan's-down all their lives.

"Well, well, well, Travers!"

"Hello, Whitney, old boy!"

The greeting sprang from their lips simultaneously, and after he had tossed his hat and cane to his valet Travers Gladwin continued:

"Didn't expect to see me so soon, did you, old scout?"

"I should say I didn't. Why, when I got that telegram of yours to call up Thomas Smith at the Ritz it certainly was some jar to my delicate nervous system."

Travers Gladwin laughed and rubbed his hands.

"Did it, though?" he cried. "Gave you a real thrill, eh?"

"Exact and specific--a real thrill."

"Well, you're lucky--a surprise and a thrill. I'd give anything for a real surprise--I've hunted this little planet's four corners for one and failed to connect."

"If you can't achieve 'em you seem to be in the business of manufacturing 'em. Come along now, what's all this thundering mystery. I'm shot to pieces with curiosity. What's happened to make

you come home like this?"

"Watkins!" replied Travers Gladwin curtly.

"Watkins! What Watkins? Who's Watkins?"

"Watkins is my man--I mean, Watkins was my man before I found out that he was systematically robbing me."

"Oh, I remember now. A jolly good servant, though. So he robbed you, did he? But they all do."

"Yes, but they don't always get found out--caught with the goods, as the police say. I caught Watkins with the goods and sacked him."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you came kiting home from the pyramids and the lovely Sahara desert just because this chap Watkins was dishonest?" said Whitney Barnes, in tones of incredulity.

"No, Whitney," replied Gladwin, dropping into a chair and puckering his forehead with a frown.

"Watkins was only the start of it. I got rid of him six months ago. But while I was on my way to Egypt I learned that Watkins and my lawyer had been in some sort of a secret correspondence before I gave Watkins the bounce."

"What lawyer? Not 'Old Reliable' Forbes? Why, I thought he wore a certified halo."

"So did I, but I've got news to the contrary, and you know he has charge of everything for me--keeps all my securities--has a power of attorney--signs checks and all that."

"That sounds bad," said Whitney Barnes, sympathetically. "The old saint could come pretty close to ruining you."

"Now you've hit it," assented Gladwin. "So I've come home to investigate--sleuthing expedition, you might say. Didn't want him to hear I was coming and climb out. Now you've got the answer to the gumshoe riddle. My plan is to lie low and have you look him up. Nothing else on foot, Whitney? Haven't gone into mustard or Wall street, have you?"

It was Whitney Barnes's turn to construct a frown and take on an air of intense seriousness, while his friend smiled at him, thinking it was one of his humorous moods.

"Can't say I have anything definite on foot," said Barnes slowly, "but the pater has given me a rather important commission to fulfil, though not exactly in mustard."

"Well, then," said Travers Gladwin with a trace of annoyance, "I'd better call on somebody else. I"--

"Nothing of the sort," broke in Whitney Barnes. "It may fit right in with my plans. It'll keep me circulating round a lot and that's just what I want--that and what Bateato is bringing," as the little brown man entered the room on the run, bearing a silver tray, decanter and glasses.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURSE OF MILLIONS.

As Travers Gladwin's valet filled the tall, slim glasses with the fizzing amber-colored fluid which constitutes the great American highball, the two friends stretched their legs and lost themselves for a few moments in aimless reverie. Bateato looked from one to the other, puzzled by their seriousness. He clinked the glasses to rouse them and glided from the room. Whitney Barnes was the first to look up and shake himself free of the sober spell that gripped him.

"What the deuce made you skip abroad in such a hurry, Travers?" he asked, reaching for his glass.

Travers Gladwin sat up with a start, pulled a lugubrious smile and replied:

"Bored to death--nothing interested me--living the most commonplace, humdrum, unromantic existence imaginable. Teas and dances, dances and teas, clubs and theatres, theatres and clubs, motors and yachts, yachts and motors. It was horrible, and I can't help thinking it was all my dear old governor's fault. He had no consideration for me."

"He left you a tidy lot of millions," drawled Whitney Barnes.

Young Gladwin drained his glass, jumped to his feet and began to pace the room, hands deep in his trousers pockets.

"That was just it!" he flung out. "If he'd left me nothing but a shilling or two there'd be some joy in living. I'd have had to buckle down. There's variety, interest, pleasure in having to make your own way in the world."

Whitney Barnes laughed mockingly.

"Go out and tell that to the toiling masses," he chuckled, "and listen to them give you the ha-ha."

You're in a bad way, old chap--better see a brain specialist."

"I know I'm in a bad way," Gladwin ran on fiercely, "but doctors can't do me any good. It was all right while I was a frolicking lamb, but after I got over the age of thinking myself a devil of a fellow things began to grow tame. I was romantic, sentimental--wanted to fall in love."

"Now you interest me," Whitney Barnes interjected, stiffening to attention.

"Yes, I wanted to fall in love, Whitney, but I couldn't get it out of my head that every girl I met had her eye on my fortune and not on me. And if it wasn't the girl it was her mother, and mothers, that is mothers-in-law-to-be or mothers-that-want-to-be-in-law or--what the deuce do I mean?"

"I get you, Steve--they're awful. Go on."

"Well, I gave it up--the hunt for the right girl."

"The dickens you say! I wish you hadn't told me that."

"And I went in for art," Gladwin raced on, carried breathlessly on the tide of his emotions and ignoring his friend's observations. "I went in for these things on the walls, statuary, ceramics, rugs, and tapestries."

"You've got a mighty fine collection," struck in Barnes.

"Yes, but I soon got tired of art--I still hungered for romance. I went abroad to find it. I said to myself, 'If there's a real thrill anywhere on this earth for a poor millionaire, I'll try and find it--make a thorough search. It wasn't any use. Every country I went to was the same. All I could find were things my money could buy and all those things have long ceased to interest me. There was only once in all the years I've been craving a romance'---

"Hold up there, Travers Gladwin, you're talking like Methusaleh. You've been of age only a few years."

"Seems centuries, but as I started to say--there was only once. Two years ago in a trolley car, right here in the midst of this heartless city. Seated opposite me was a girl--a blonde--most beautiful hair you ever saw. No use my trying to describe her eyes, clearest, bluest and keep right on piling up the superlatives--peaches and cream complexion with a transparent down on it, dimples and all that sort of thing. You know the kind--a goddess every inch of her. Her clothes were poor and I knew by that she was honest."

The young man paused and gazed rapturously into space.

"Go on; go on," urged Barnes. "Poor but honest."

"I caught her eye once and my heart thumped--could feel it beating against my cigarette case."

"That's the real soul-mate stuff; go on!" cried Barnes.

"Well, she got off at one of the big shops. I followed. She went in one of the employees' entrances. She worked there--I could see that."

"And did you wait for her to go out to lunch?"

"No, I had an engagement. Next day I caught that same car, but she was not on it. I kept on trying and the fourth day she was on the car, looking lovelier than ever. When she got off the car I got off. I stepped up and raised my hat.

"'Forgive me for approaching you in this impertinent manner,' I said, 'but I would like to introduce myself,' and I handed her my card."

The youthful head of the house of Gladwin stopped abruptly and slid listlessly into a chair.

"I demand to hear what she replied," insisted Barnes.

"It wasn't just what she said," mused Gladwin, "though that was bad enough, but it was the way she said it. These were her exact words, 'Go on, yer fresh slob, an' sneak yer biscuits!' How does that suit you for exploding a romance?"

"Blown to powder and bits," murmured Whitney Barnes, sombrely. "Sorry you told me this--never mind why--but there's one thing I've been wanting to ask you for a long time: How about that girl you rescued from drowning four years ago? I remember it made you quite famous at the time. According to all standards of romance, you should have married her."

Travers Gladwin looked up with a wry smile.

"Did you ever see the lady?" he asked sharply.

"No. Wasn't she pretty?"

"She was a brunette."

"You don't fancy brunettes?"

"She was a dark brunette."

"Dark?"

"Yes, from Africa."

"That was tough luck!" exclaimed Barnes without cracking a smile.

CHAPTER X.

THE HEARTBEATS OF MR. HOGG.

In a magnificently furnished apartment on Madison avenue, which Mrs. Elvira Burton had rented for New York's winter season, that augustly beautiful or beautifully august lady sat writing. I may say that she was writing grimly and that there was Jovian determination stamped upon her high, broad forehead and indented at the corners of her tense lips.

She had just returned from a consultation with two matrons of the same stern fibre as herself. No group of gray-bearded physicians had ever weighed the fate of a patient with more attention to pathological detail than had Mrs. Burton and her two friends weighed the fate of Helen Burton, but whereas it rarely happens that pork is prescribed in a delicate case, the result of that petticoated conclave was that Hogg was prescribed for the flower-like ward of the leader of Omaha's socially elect.

While Mrs. Burton had done most of the talking, her two friends who had broken into New York's next-to-the-top layer of society by means of the hyphens with which they coupled the names of their first and second husbands; her two friends, I say, had managed to wedge in a word or two--all in favor of Jabez Hogg.

The guardian of the two prettiest girls who had ever debutanted in the Nebraska metropolis emerged from that conference on fire with resolve. She would marry Helen to Mr. Hogg, thus link together the Hogg and Burton millions and thereby create an alliance that would take its place beside any in the country in the matter of bank account.

So confident was she of the power of her will that she did not even remove her wraps before she sat down to answer Jabez Hogg's letter. Nor did she bother to ask her maid if Helen and Sadie had returned from their ride. She did not care to discuss the matter with them. She had decided. It remained only for weaker wills to yield.

Beginning with a regal flourish of the pen, she wrote:

"MY DEAR MR. HOGG: I received this morning your courteous note, begging me to persuade Helen to give you a final answer. It pains me deeply that you should suffer so from her neglect--after all your kindness. I trust that you will forgive it on the score of her youth. She is very young and her head has been turned with too much flattery. She shall be yours--that I can promise you. When you come on for your annual slaughter-house directors' meeting you may bring the ring. I have already given the order for the engraving of the engagement announcements, and I will arrange to give a reception and dance for Helen at the Plaza. I do not know how to thank you for putting your French car at our disposal. It has saved us a great deal of annoyance and bother. Helen has spoken often of your thoughtfulness"---

Mrs. Burton stayed her flying pen and grimly read the last sentence aloud. It was not the strict truth, as she was writing it. Helen had spoken frequently of the convenience of the car, but she had added that she could never ride in it without feeling that she was going to run over a pig and hear it squeal.

Mrs. Burton did not waver for more than an instant, however. In a way of speaking she gripped her conscience by the neck, strangled it, and threw it into the discard. Then she continued with her letter:

"I have been looking at houses on the avenue and would suggest that you try and negotiate for the Gladwin mansion. The owner lives abroad, and while it is not in the market I am advised that the young man would be glad to get rid of it. He is said to be living a fast life in Paris, and while he was left a great fortune he would probably be glad to get the ready money. I know of no finer home in New York for you to settle down in after your honeymoon.

"Thanking you again for your constant thoughtfulness and hoping that you will now banish every doubt from your mind, I remain,

"Faithfully yours,
"ELVIRA BURTON."

The smile with which Mrs. Burton sealed this letter and delivered it to her maid was more than a smile of triumph. It was a positively fiendish smile of victory.

CHAPTER XI.

GAINSBOROUGH "BLUE BOY."

Having discounted the romantic element of his thrilling rescue at Narragansett Pier, Travers

Gladwin fell into a moody silence. The more volatile Barnes felt the influence and strove to fight it off. While he, too, had been set upon the trail of romance at the behest of his father, he felt it was too early to indulge in pessimistic reveries, so he groped for another subject with which to revive the interest of his friend.

"I say, Travers," he led off, rising from his chair and indicating the walls with a sweep of his hand, "as I remarked before, you've got a wonderful collection here."

"Yes," assented the young millionaire without animation, "but, as I said before, I soon got tired of it. The pastime of collecting pictures became a burden, and I was glad to get abroad and forget it."

"Well," said Barnes, "I guess the only thing for you to do is to go to work at something."

"I know it," grumbled Gladwin, "but what's the incentive? I don't want any more money--what I have now is the biggest sort of a nuisance. Just see the trouble I'm in for with my lawyer and that man Watkins, though to tell you the truth I am beginning to enjoy the novelty of that."

The young man got up and assumed a more lively expression.

"Do you know, Whitney," he ran on, "this travelling incognito isn't half bad. They are really getting suspicious of me at the Ritz."

"But surely some one there ought to know you."

"Not a soul! It was opened while I was abroad. You know I registered as Thomas Smith and I even took a chance and went down into the grill room for lunch. And there, Whitney," cried Gladwin with an explosive burst of enthusiasm, "I nearly got a thrill--another one like that on the trolley car. The last place you'd expect it, too, in the midst of stiff formality and waiters so cold and haughty they might have risen from the dead."

"I suppose this was the ravishing girl at the cigar counter?" said Barnes, ironically.

"Nothing of the sort--never smoked a cigar in her life--I mean, that is, well, something entirely different. But she was a beauty! Golden bronze hair--Titian never painted anything like it; the bluest eyes behind the most wonderful dark lashes, creamy white skin"---

"And you followed her to a cloak factory, where you found"---

"Please wait till I finish, Whitney. I followed her nowhere, though she interested me tremendously. I wish you could have seen her eat."

"Eat?"

"Particularly the grapefruit. By Jove, Barnes, that girl certainly loves grapefruit! It was fascinating. I couldn't keep my eyes off of her."

"And did she notice you?" quizzed Barnes, raising his eyebrows.

"She was too busy," came the gloomy rejoinder. "I watched her steadily, fairly bored her with my eyes--tried to will her to look at me. They say you can do that, you know--mental telepathy, projecting thought waves or something of the sort."

"Oh, rot!" cried Barnes, impatiently. "I tried that on a dog once and I've got the scar yet."

"But I tell you, Whitney, it almost worked. After a time her eyelids began to flutter and the roses in her cheeks bloomed darker. But just as I felt sure she would look up and see me--splash! the grapefruit hit her in the eye!"

"What!" ejaculated Whitney Barnes, wheeling open-mouthed and facing his friend.

"The juice, I mean," Gladwin laughed ruefully, "and, of course, the spell was broken. She never looked again. Dash it all, there's some sort of a lemon in all my romances!"

"You certainly do play in tough luck," sympathized Barnes. "I can see that you need bucking up, and I think I've got the right kind of remedy for you. Wait, I'll call Bateato."

Whitney Barnes stepped briskly across the room and pressed a button. In a twinkling the little Jap appeared.

"Bateato," said Barnes, "has your master any hunting clothes at the hotel?"

"Ees, sair!" responded the Jap. "Plenty hotel--plenty house. We no time pack all clothes--go sail too quick."

"Plenty here--splendid!" enthused Barnes. "Pack a bag for him, Bateato, this instant--enough things to last a couple of weeks."

"What's all this?" cut in Gladwin. "What are you going to do?"

"Never you mind," retorted Barnes, importantly; "you do as I say, Bateato--I'm going to show your master some excitement. He'll never get it here in town."

"Ees, sair! I pack him queeck," and Bateato vanished noiselessly, seemingly to shoot through the doorway and up the broad staircase as if sucked up a flue.

"But see here"---objected Travers Gladwin.

"Not a word now," his friend choked him off. "If you don't like it you don't have to stay, but I'm going to take you in hand and show you a time you're not used to."

"But I don't"---

"Don't let's argue about it," said Barnes, lightly. "You called me in here to take charge of things and I'm taking charge. Just to change the subject, tell me something about your paintings. This one, for instance--who is that haughty looking old chap?"

Whitney Barnes had planted himself with legs spread wide apart in front of one of the largest portraits in the room, a life-size painting of an aristocratic looking old man who seemed on the point of strangling in his stock.

Travers Gladwin turned to the painting and said with an unmistakable note of pride:

"The original Gladwin, my great-grandfather. Painted more than a hundred years ago by Gilbert Stuart."

"I guess you beat me, Travers--the original Barnes hadn't discovered mustard a hundred years ago. But I say, here's a Gainsborough, 'The Blue Boy.' By George! that's a stunner! Worth a small fortune, I suppose."

Whitney Barnes had crossed the room and stood before the most striking looking portrait in the collection, a tall, handsome boy in a vividly blue costume of the Gainsborough period.

The owner of "The Blue Boy" turned around, cast a fleeting glimpse at the portrait and turned away with a peculiar grimace.

"You suppose wrong, Whitney," he said, shortly. "That isn't--so--horribly--valuable."

"What! A big painting like that, by a chap famous enough to have a hat named after him."

"That was just about the way it struck me at first," answered Gladwin, "so I begged two old gentlemen in London to let me have it. Persuaded them to part with it for a mere five hundred pounds, on condition--close attention, Whitney--that I keep the matter a secret. I was delighted with my bargain--until I saw *the original*."

"The original?"

"Ah ha! the original. It was quite a shock for me to come face to face with that and realize that my 'Blue Boy' had a streak of yellow in him."

"That sounds exciting," cried Barnes. "What did you do? Put the case in the hands of the police?"

"Not much," denied Gladwin emphatically. "That would have given the public a fine laugh. It deceived me, so I hung it up there to deceive others. It got you, you see. But you are the only one I've let into the secret--don't repeat it, will you?"

"Never!" promised Barnes. "It'll be too much of a lark to hear others rave over it."

"Thank you," acknowledged the bitten collector, curtly.

Barnes wandered from "The Blue Boy" and signalled out another painting.

"Who painted this?" he asked.

"That's a Veber--but do you know, Whitney, the more I think of it--there's something about that grapefruit girl, something gripping that"---

"I like these two," commented Barnes.

"There's something different about her--something"---

"Who is this by?" inquired Barnes, lost in admiration of a Meissonier.

"A blonde"---

"What?"

"And very young, and I know her smile"---

"Look here, Travers, what are these two worth?"

Gladwin volplaned to earth, climbed out of his sky chariot and was back in the midst of his art treasures again.

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily. "Which two?"

Barnes pointed to two of the smaller pictures.

"Guess," suggested his host.

"Five thousand."

"Multiply it by ten--then add something."

"No, really."

"Yes, really! That one on the left is a Rembrandt! and the other is a Corot!"

"My word; they're corkers, eh!"

"Yes, when you know who painted them, and if you happen to have the eye of a connoisseur."

"And what in creation is this?" exclaimed Barnes, as he stumbled against the great ornamental chest which stood against the wall just beneath the Rembrandt and Corot.

"Oh, let's get the exhibition over," said Gladwin, peevishly. "That's a treasure chest. Cost me a barrel--picked it up in Egypt."

"You never picked it up in your life," retorted Barnes, grasping the great metal bound chest and

striving vainly to lift it. "Anything in it?" he asked, lifting the lid and answering himself in the negative.

"What's the whole collection worth?" asked Barnes, as he returned to where his friend was standing, gazing ruefully at "The Blue Boy."

"Oh, half a million or more. I really never kept track."

"Half a million! And you go abroad and leave all these things unguarded? You certainly are fond of taking chances. It's a marvel they haven't been stolen before now."

"Nonsense," said Gladwin. "I have a burglar alarm set here, and I'll wager there aren't half a dozen persons who know the Gladwin collection is hung in this house."

"Just the same--but I say, Travers, there's the door bell. Were you expecting anybody else?"

Gladwin glanced about him nervously.

"No," he said sharply. "On the contrary, I didn't wish--what the deuce does it mean?"

"It means some one is at the door."

CHAPTER XII.

APPROACHING A WORLD OF MYSTERY.

Gaston Brielle, the strawberry blonde French chauffeur who piloted the big, luxurious motor car Jabez Hogg of Omaha had placed at the service of Mrs. Elvira Burton and her two charming young nieces, did not have his mind entirely concentrated upon manipulating the wheel and throttle of the car as he swung around Grant's Tomb and sped southward down the Drive. While his knowledge of English was confined to a few expletives of a profane nature and the mystic jargon of the garage, he was nevertheless thrilled by the belief that the two mademoiselles behind him were plotting some mysterious enterprise.

From time to time they had unconsciously dropped their voices to the low tones commonly used by conspirators, or at least that was the way Gaston had sensed it. Along the silent roads of Central Park and Riverside Drive, where even the taxis seemed to employ their mufflers and to resort less frequently to the warning racket of their exhausts, the Frenchman had been straining his ears to listen.

He had heard on two occasions what he divined as a manifest sob, first when the emotional Sadie gave way to tears and again when Helen was aggravated to a petulant outburst of grief.

Later when he heard bright laughter and gay exclamations he could hardly believe his ears. He was profoundly troubled and completely bewildered--a dangerous state of mind for a man who has the power of seventy horses under the pressure of his thumb.

Nor was his mental turmoil in the least alleviated when, having turned south and being on the point of coasting down a precipitous hill he felt a touch on his shoulder and heard the elder of his two pretty passengers command him in worse French than his own poor English to go slow when he turned into Fifth avenue again and be prepared to stop.

Gaston knew that this was in direct violation of his orders from Mrs. Burton, but when he saw a yellow-backed bill flutter down over his shoulder his quick intelligence blazed with understanding. His first groping suspicions had been justified. There was romance in the wind. Steering easily with one hand, Gaston deftly seized the bill and caused it to vanish somewhere in his great fur coat.

Sadie Burton had been horror-stricken at this bold proffer of a bribe. Likewise she was alarmed that Helen should put so much trust in Gaston, who seemed to be in mortal terror of her aunt and to quake all through his body when he listened to her commands.

As Helen sank back beside her, after letting fall the bribe, the agitated Sadie whispered tremulously:

"Are you sure you can trust him, Helen? If he should tell Auntie El she would surely make you a prisoner. You will never get a chance to leave her side at the opera to-night."

"Gaston is a Frenchman, my dear," laughed Helen, confidently, "and most Frenchmen--even chauffeurs, I am sure--would cut their hearts out before they would oppose a barrier to the course of true love."

But Helen's gayety did not communicate itself to Sadie. That shy miss trembled apprehensively as she sought to picture herself in Helen's place--on the verge of an elopement. Not that such a prospect did not have its alluring thrill even to such a shrinking maiden as the violet-eyed Sadie, but her fear of her aunt seemed to crush and obliterate these titillating sensations. As the car shot through Seventy-second street and headed for the entrance to the West Drive of Central Park, she ventured another word of caution.

"Wouldn't it be better to send a messenger to Mr. Gladwin's house, Helen? Suppose we should run into somebody there who knew auntie?"

"You ridiculously little afraid-cat," Helen caught her up. "Of course there'll be nobody there but Travers, or perhaps his man or some of the other servants. He has good reason for keeping very quiet now and sees absolutely nobody, not even--not even--not even his grandmother, if he has one."

"And didn't he tell you whether or not he had a grandmother, Helen?" gasped Sadie.

But Helen disdained to reply, her heart suddenly filling with rapture at the prospect of an immediate meeting with her betrothed.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAVERS GLADWIN GETS A THRILL.

A ring at the door bell should suggest to the ordinary mind that some person or persons clamored for admission, but Whitney Barnes's announcement seemed to have difficulty in hammering its way into Travers Gladwin's gray matter and thence downward into the white matter of his brain cells.

"What is some one at the door for?" he asked vacuously.

"To see you, of course," snapped Barnes.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other with annoyance. "The house has been closed for ages and you are the only one who knows I am home. Why I"---

Bateato skimmed in, grinning like a full moon.

"Well, what is it?" his master asked, shortly,

"Two ladies, sair!"

"Two--that's good!" chimed in Barnes. "They must have got a wireless that I was here."

"What do they want?" Gladwin addressed Bateato.

"You, sair," replied the Jap. "They say you come to door one minute."

"Two ladies to see me? Are you sure?" Travers Gladwin was both bewildered and embarrassed.

"Ees, sair!" Bateato assured him.

"Did you tell them that I was here?"

"They no ask. They say, 'Please, Mr. Gladwin come to door!'"

"Well, you tell them Mr. Gladwin is not at home--that I'm out, away--in Egypt."

"Ees, sair," and Bateato was about to skim out into the hallway again when Barnes stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Bateato--what do they look like?"

"Look nice, sair," and Bateato's moon-like grin returned in full beam.

"You're sure?" asked Barnes, gravely.

"Oh, fine," uttered the Jap, enthusiastically.

"Young?" inquired Barnes.

"Ees, sair--much young--come in autbile. I tell them you no home?" turning to Gladwin.

"No, wait," responded Gladwin, his curiosity taking fire. "You tell them to come in."

"They say you come door."

"Very well," but Whitney Barnes stopped him.

"Better see them in here, Travers. If they really want to see you they'll come in. Ask them to come in, Bateato."

The little Jap was gone with the speed and noiselessness of a mouse.

"Who in heaven's name can it be?" whispered Travers Gladwin as Bateato could be heard lipping in the vestibule. Before Whitney Barnes managed to frame a reply a swift, muffled step was audible and Helen Burton stood framed in the narrow space between the portières. Her timid cousin stopped behind her, staring timidly over her shoulder. She was manifestly surprised and startled as she paused and regarded the two young men.

In point of startled surprise, however, Travers Gladwin's emotion matched hers. He stared at her almost rudely in his amazement and involuntarily he turned to Whitney Barnes and said under his breath:

"The grapefruit girl!"

Whitney Barnes's lips merely framed: "No! You don't mean it!"

He was going to add something more, when the two girls came on into the room diffidently and stood by the great carved table, close together, as if prepared to cling to one another in case something extraordinary happened. Travers Gladwin was the first of the two young men to come to their rescue.

"Pardon me! Did you wish to see me?" he said with his best bow.

"No," replied Helen Burton quickly, her lips trembling; "we want to see Mr. Gladwin, please."

The young man did not recover instantly from this staggering jolt, and a clock somewhere in the great hall nearby ticked a dozen strokes before he managed to mumble:

"Well--er--I am"--

"Isn't he here?" broke in the brown-haired beauty, breathlessly. "His man just asked us to come into this room to see him."

"What Mr. Gladwin did you want?" asked that young man incoherently.

"Why, Mr. Travers Gladwin!" exclaimed the girl indignantly, the color mantling to her forehead. "Is there more than one?"

"Well--er--that is," the young man turned desperately to his friend, "do you know Mr. Gladwin?"

"Do I know him?" cried Helen Burton, and then, with a hysterical little laugh as she turned to her cousin, "I should think I did know him. I know him very, very well."

Sadie Burton appeared both distressed and frightened and slipped limply down into one of the great chairs beside her. As Travers Gladwin's features passed through a series of vacant and bewildered expressions and as the attention of Whitney Barnes seemed to be focussed with strange intensity upon the prettiness of the shy and silent Sadie, anger flashed in Helen's expressive eyes as she again addressed the young man, who felt as if some mysterious force had just robbed him of his identity.

"You don't suppose," she said, drawing herself to the full height of her graceful figure, "that I would come here to see Travers Gladwin if I didn't know him, do you?"

"No, no, no--of course not!" sputtered the young man. "It was stupid of me to ask such a question. Please forgive me. I--er"--

Helen turned from him as if to speak to Sadie, who sat with erect primness suffering from what she sensed as a strange and overpowering stroke. She had permitted herself to look straight into the eyes of Whitney Barnes and hold the look for a long, palpitating second.

While Sadie was groping in her mind for some explanation of the strange thrill, Whitney Barnes had flung himself headlong into a new sensation and was determined to make the most of it, so when Travers Gladwin turned to him and asked:

"I rather think Gladwin's gone out, don't you?" Barnes nodded and answered positively:

"He was here only a few minutes ago."

This reply drew Helen's attention immediately to Barnes and taking a step forward she said eagerly:

"Oh, I hope he's here. You see, it's awfully important--what I want to see him about."

Whitney Barnes nodded with extraordinary animation and turning to Gladwin impaled that young man with the query:

"Why don't you find out if he's in?"

While Gladwin had come up for air he was still partially drowned. Turning to Helen Burton, he forced an agreeable smile and said hurriedly:

"Yes, if you'll excuse me a moment I'll see, but may I give him your name?"

It was Helen's turn to recoil and stepping to where Sadie had at last got upon her feet, she whispered:

"Shall I tell him? They both act so strangely."

"Oh, no, Helen, dear," fluttered Sadie. "It may be some awful trap or something."

While this whispered conclave was going on Travers Gladwin made a frantic signal to Whitney Barnes behind his back and mumbled:

"Try and find out what it's all about?"

"I will--leave that to me," said Barnes confidently.

Leaving her cousin's side, Helen again confronted the two young men and said tremulously:

"I'd rather not give my name. I know that sounds odd, but for certain reasons"---

"Oh, of course, if you'd rather not," answered Gladwin.

"If you will just say," Helen ran on breathlessly, "that I had to come early to tell him something--something about to-night--he'll understand and know who I am."

"Certainly, certainly," said the baffled young millionaire. "Say that you want to see him about something that's going to happen to-night"---

"Yes, if you'll be so kind," and Helen gave the young man a smile that furnished him the thrill he had hunted for all over the globe, with a margin to boot.

"I'll be right back," he gasped, spun on his heel and passed dizzily out into the hallway.

CHAPTER XIV.

THRILL BEGETS THRILL.

Gladwin's exit from the room served as a signal for the agile-witted Barnes to strike while the iron was hot. His friend had hardly vanished through the portières when he turned to Helen with an air of easy confidence, looking frankly into her eyes, and said:

"It's singular that my friend doesn't know what you referred to--the object of your call," and he nodded his head with a knowing smile.

"Why, do you?" asked Helen eagerly, coming toward him.

Whitney's knowing smile increased in its quality of knowingness and he spoke with an inflection that was quite baffling.

"Well," he said, in a confiding whisper, "I have an idea; but he"--jerking his thumb over his shoulder where Travers Gladwin was last seen departing from view--"is Travers Gladwin's most intimate friend."

The astonishing character of this information served only further to confuse the beautiful Miss Burton's already obfuscated reasoning faculties and hypnotize her into that receptive condition where she was capable of believing any solemnly expressed statement.

"Really!" she said with a little start of surprise.

"Oh, yes," ran on the glib Barnes, "they are lifelong chums--love each other like brothers; one of those Castor and Pollox affairs, you know--only more so. Never have any secrets from each other and all that sort of thing."

Helen dropped back into her chair and her brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"That's curious," she said. "I don't think Travers ever spoke to me about that kind of a friend."

The idea was just burgeoning in her mind to ask for the friend's name when Barnes hastened on:

"Well, now that is singular. Are you sure that"--

The sudden brisk return of Travers Gladwin saved Barnes from an immediate excruciating tax upon his ingenuity.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Gladwin, going to Helen and shaking his head regretfully, "but I couldn't find him."

"Oh, dear! That's very provoking!" cried Helen. "He didn't say he was going out, did he?"

"No; I could have sworn he was here a few minutes ago," spoke up Barnes, turning his head away for fear his smile would suddenly get out of control.

"Well, is his man here?" demanded the girl.

"Why, he let you in," blurted Gladwin.

"I don't mean the Japanese."

"You mean the butler, perhaps," Gladwin corrected.

"Yes," Helen answered mechanically.

Travers Gladwin felt it was time for Barnes to take a hand again, as his mental airship was bucking badly in the invisible air currents.

"Is Gladwin's butler here?" he inquired sharply, frowning at Barnes.

"No," said Barnes promptly.

"I am sorry, but he is not here," Gladwin communicated to Helen.

"Well, where is he?" cried the exasperated Helen.

"Where is he?" Gladwin asked Barnes.

Whitney Barnes went down for the count of one but bobbed up serenely.

"Where is he?" he said with a nonchalant gesture. "Oh, he's giving a lecture on butling."

The bewildered Miss Burton did not catch the text of this explanation. In her increasing

agitation she wrung her hands in her muff and almost sobbed:

"I'm sure I don't know what to do. I simply must get word to him somehow. It's awfully important."

Whitney Barnes saw the trembling lip and the dampening eye and strove to avert a catastrophe that would probably double the difficulty of probing into the mystery. Turning to Gladwin, but half directing his remarks to Helen, he said:

"I've just been telling the ladies that you and Travers are bosom pals."

Travers Gladwin flashed one look of amazement and then caught on.

"Oh, yes," he cried, "we are very close to each other--I couldn't begin to tell you how close."

"And I have also hinted," pursued Barnes, "that you never have any secrets from each other, and that I felt sure that you knew all about--all about--a--a er--to-night."

"Oh, of course," assented Gladwin, beginning to warm up to his part and feel the rich thrill of the mystery involved. "Yes, yes--of course--he's told me all about to-night."

"Has he?" gasped Helen, looking into the young man's brown eyes for confirmation, feeling that she liked the eyes, but uncertain that she read the confirmation.

"Yes, everything," lied Gladwin, now glowing with enthusiasm.

All this while the shy and silent Sadie had remained demurely in her chair looking from one to the other and vainly endeavoring to catch the drift of the conversation.

Sadie was too dainty a little soul to be possessed of real reasoning faculties. The one thought that had been uppermost in her mind all day was that Helen was taking a desperate step, probably embarking upon some terrible tragedy. She had hungered for an opportunity to compare notes with some sturdier will than her own and the instant she heard Travers Gladwin admit that he "knew all about to-night" she rose from her chair and asked, breathlessly, turning up her big, appealing eyes to Travers Gladwin:

"Then won't you--oh, please, won't you--tell her what you think of it?"

There was something so naïve and innocent in Sadie's attitude and expression that Whitney Barnes was charmed. It also tickled his soul to see how thoroughly his friend was stumped. So to add to Travers's confusion he chimed in:

"Oh, yes, go on and tell her what you think of it."

"I'd rather not," said Gladwin ponderously, trying to escape from the appealing eyes.

"But really you ought to, old chap," reproved Barnes. "It's your duty to."

"Oh, yes, please do!" implored Sadie.

The victim was caught three ways. Both young ladies regarded him earnestly and with looks that hung upon his words, while Barnes stood to one side with a solemn long face, elbow in one hand and chin gripped tightly in the other, manifestly for the moment withdrawn from rescue duty. There was nothing for the badgered young man to do but mentally roll up his sleeves and plunge in.

"Well, then," with exaggerated sobriety, "if you must know--I think--that is, when I was thinking of it--or I mean, what I had thought of it, when I was thinking of it--turning it over in my mind, you know--why, it didn't seem to me--I am afraid"--turning squarely on Helen--"what I am going to say will offend you."

"On the contrary," cried Helen, flushing to her tiny pink ears, "if you are Travers's best friend, I should like to know just what you think of it."

"Well, then," said Travers Gladwin desperately, "if you must know the truth, I don't like it."

"There!" breathed Sadie, overjoyed, and dropped back in her chair.

But Helen Burton was far from pleased.

"You don't like what?" she demanded.

"Why--this thing to-night," he groped.

"You wouldn't say that if you knew Mr. Hogg," the indignant girl flung out.

"There, Gladwin--that's a clincher--you don't know Hogg."

Whitney Barnes was up to his ears in clover.

"How do you know I don't know him?" asked Gladwin, a little wildly.

"Why, how could you?" said Helen, accusingly.

"How could I know Mr. Hogg?"

"Yes."

"Why, just go out to his pen, introduce yourself and shake his tail."

Helen failed to see the humor of this sally and again the tears struggled for an outlet.

"Now you're making fun of me," she said, turning away. "I think it's very unkind."

Travers Gladwin felt a sharp pang of remorse and hated himself for his break. In his eagerness

to repair the wound, he stepped to the young girl's side and said with great seriousness:

"I wouldn't hurt you in any way for the world."

Helen looked up at him and read the soul of sincerity and sympathy in his eyes. She was both reassured and embarrassed by the intensity of his look.

"Really?" she managed to murmur, backing away and sitting down again.

The mention of Mr. Hogg had inflamed Whitney Barnes's curiosity, and he desired to know more of that unknown.

"Well, I don't see what Mr. Hogg has to do with it," he spoke up.

"Why, Auntie insists upon my marrying him."

Helen blurted this out involuntarily

"That's dreadful!" exclaimed Whitney Barnes, and Helen rewarded him with a smile of gratitude.

CHAPTER XV.

HEROISM, LOVE AND SOMETHING ELSE.

The embarrassment of both the girls had begun to wear off. The two strange young men, notwithstanding the unaccounted-for absence of the object of Helen's quest, began to appear less strange. Both possessed potent attractions and undeniable magnetism.

The shy and shrinking Sadie was sure she liked that tall and slender young man with the easy drawl and bright, humorous eyes immensely. The boldness of his glances made her heart beat pleasantly. To her he seemed to possess the master will and wit of the pair, and she felt she could repose perfect confidence in him.

For her part Helen was uncertain just how to sense the situation. One side of her will urged her to leave a message for her betrothed and hurry away. Another strain of consciousness held her fast.

Travers Gladwin's psychic waves that had so utterly failed in the grill room of the Ritz may or may not have had something to do with this. He felt inspired with a desire to prolong the interview indefinitely. He could not recall ever having been so attracted by the charming personality of any girl as he was by this distressed maiden who was so eager to see her Travers Gladwin.

He was flattered, even by the compliment of having the same name as the unknown. As a further expression of sympathy with Helen in the matter of Mr. Hogg he said earnestly:

"Do you mean to tell me that your aunt insists upon you marrying this--hog?"

"Yes," replied Helen, passionately. "And he's awful, and I hate him, and I won't--I just won't."

"I think you're absolutely right," Gladwin agreed with her.

"Oh, you do?" cried the delighted Helen. Then, turning triumphantly upon her cousin she exclaimed:

"There!"

But Sadie's one idea did not include Mr. Hogg. She considered the elopement as a separate matter in which Mr. Hogg was in no way involved, wherefore she said:

"But you've only known Mr. Gladwin two weeks."

"I know," retorted Helen, "but I've loved him for four years."

"You've loved Travers Gladwin four years," said that young man in a voice hollow with wonder.

"And only known him two weeks," cut in Whitney Barnes. "By Jove, he must be one of those retroactive soul-mates."

"I've loved him four years," said Helen stiffly.

"You've loved him four years in two weeks," said Barnes in the tone of one trying to do a sum. "I give up. I can't do it."

Helen faced the heretic Barnes and announced impressively:

"Ever since the time he so bravely risked his own life to save that girl. It was splendid, noble!"

Travers Gladwin decided it was time to call a halt on the borrowing proclivities of the unknown double. It was bad enough for some one to appropriate his name, but also to take unto his bogus self the glory of the real one's heroism was too much.

"You mean that time at Narragansett?" he opened.

"Yes," said Helen. "Four years ago when he dashed into the roaring surf"---

"Yes, and fished out a cross-eyed colored lady," said Gladwin hotly.

"That's just it," returned Helen with flashing eyes and heaving bosom. "If she had been beautiful or some one dear to him, it wouldn't have been half so noble. Oh, it was fine of him!"

"And he told you about that?" asked Gladwin, numbed for the moment.

"No, he didn't. He's much too modest. I knew of it the day it happened, and he has been my ideal ever since. But would you believe it, when I first spoke to him about it he could hardly remember it. Imagine doing such a brave thing, and then forgetting all about it."

"Oh, I've forgotten lots of such things," said the unrecognized hero.

Helen's lips curled with scorn.

"Yes," the young man was stung to go on, "and what Travers Gladwin did wasn't brave at all."

"What!" Helen gasped.

"She was so fat she couldn't sink," derided Gladwin, "so I swam out to her."

"Yes," bubbled over the young man, overjoyed at the opportunity of discounting his own heroism, "I swam out to her. I told her to lie on her back and float. Well, she did, and I"---

"You!"

"Why, yes--er--you see, I was with him. He pushed her to shore. Simplest thing in the world."

Helen rose angrily. There was both indignation and reproach in her voice.

"It's shameful to try and belittle his courage, and you say you're his dearest friend." She paused for a moment, then went closer to the young man and said in a different tone:

"Oh, I understand you now--you're saying that to try and make me change my mind. But I shan't--not for anybody."

Helen crossed the room to her cousin and gave Sadie the benefit of the look of defiance with which she had confronted Travers Gladwin.

"Oh, please, please don't say that, Helen," cried Sadie, all a-flutter. "I know he will agree to a postponement."

"But I don't want any postponement," protested Helen. "I told you what I intended doing and I'm going to do it."

"Go on, tell her again--we'd all like to hear it," broke in Gladwin.

Helen swung around and said dramatically:

"I'm going to marry Travers Gladwin to-night."

Travers Gladwin reeled a little where he stood, met and turned from the beaming stare of Whitney Barnes. As he did so Helen came very close to him, laid her hand on his arm and said tremulously:

"You are his best friend. Tell me honestly, don't you think I'm right in wanting to marry him?"

This was a poser, but when he did summon an answer it came right out from the heart, his eyes devouring the beautiful girl before him as he spoke.

"Nothing on earth would please me so much as to have you marry Travers Gladwin, and I promise you now that I am going to do everything in my power to persuade you to do it."

"Oh, I am so glad!" Helen thanked him. A moment later she added with a perplexed smile: "But why did you talk about his bravery as you did?"

"Well, you see"--the young man stopped.

"I suppose," Helen suggested brightly, "being so very fond of him, you hated the idea of his marrying. Was that it?"

"Yes, but that was before I saw you. I hope you are going to like his best friend just a little."

There was no mistaking the ardent emphasis on the last sentence and Helen studied the young man's face curiously. She turned away with a blush and walked across the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TORMENT OF OFFICER 666.

Meantime Officer 666, on his aristocratic beat, four blocks up and four blocks down the Fifth avenue pave, was sticking to the east side of the street and vainly trying to keep his eyes to the front.

It was excruciating duty, with the raven-haired Rose wheeling her perambulator along the opposite way and keeping, by way of feminine perversity, on a latitudinal line with the patrolling of Michael Phelan.

There she was just opposite, always, never twisting her head an inch to give him so much as a glance or a smile. It made him wild that she should discipline her eyes in that fashion, while his would wander hither and yon, especially yon when Rose was in that direction.

The daintiness of Rose in cap and apron with a big white fichu at her throat, with one red cheek and the corner of the most kissable mouth on the avenue maddeningly visible, soon drove all memory of the Gladwin mansion and the suspicious antics of the "rat-faced little heathen" out of his mind. His one thought was that Rose would have to cross over the way at the fall of dusk and trundle her millionaire infant charge home for its prophylactic pap. There would be a bare chance for about seven or ten words with Rose. But what was he going to say?

For one hundred and nine days' running, his days off inclusive, Michael Phelan had intercepted Rose at that particular corner and begged her to name the day. The best he ever got was a smile and a flash of two laughing eyes, followed by the sally:

"Show me \$500 in the bank, Michael Phelan, and I'll talk business."

And why didn't Michael Phelan save up \$500 out of the more than \$100 a month the city paid him for his services? Rose didn't get a quarter of that, and she had already saved \$300, besides which she sent a one-pound note home to Ireland every month.

The reason was this--Michael Phelan turned in his wages each month to his mother, and out of what she allowed him to spend he couldn't have saved \$500 in five hundred years, at least not to his way of thinking. The trouble was that Rose had more than an inkling of this, and it galled her to think that her gallant brass-buttoned cop should permit himself to be still harnessed to his mother's apron strings.

Yes, down in the invisible depths of Rose's heart she was very fond of the faithful and long-suffering Michael, but even so she couldn't bring herself to marry a milksop who was likely to make her play second fiddle to his mother. And when Rose once made up her mind, she was as grimly determined as she was pretty.

The sun had swung down behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the trees that bordered the Park wall had begun to trace their shadows on the marble fronts of the mansions across the way when Rose suddenly wheeled the gig containing Master Croesus and walked demurely toward Officer 666.

Michael Phelan blushed till he could feel his back hair singeing, but he stopped stock still and waited. Rose gave no sign until she was within half a dozen feet of him. Then she looked up pertly and exclaimed:

"Why, if it ain't Michael Phelan!"

"It is, Rose, an' with the same question pantin' on his lips," broke out the young man, his bosom surging and his heart rapping under his shield.

"And what is that same question, Mr. Phelan?" asked the tantalizing Rose.

Officer 666 choked with emotion.

"Will ye name the day, d-d-d-ar"---

He stopped and looked round about him fearfully, for Sergeant McGinnis was due on his rounds and Sergeant McGinnis, though married, had an eye like a hawk for a pretty girl and a tongue like an adder for a patrolman caught sparking.

Rose's eyes flashed and her lips drew taut. She started forward, but turned her head to face Phelan as she walked away.

"I'll give you an answer, Michael," she said in parting, "when ye may set up your own home for your own"---

That was all Phelan heard and possibly all that the young woman uttered, for just then Master Croesus set up a bawl that was most common and vulgar in its utter lack of restraint. There could be no more to the interview that day with young Master Croesus in such vociferous mood, so Officer 666 turned away with a heaving sigh and plodded dolefully along on his beat.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRAVERS GLADWIN IS CONSIDERABLY JARRED.

Taking time out to sense the bruised condition of your heart isn't a whole lot different from taking time out to recover from a jolt received in the prize ring. Having released that impassioned sentence, "I hope you are going to like his best friend just a little!" young Mr.

Gladwin felt a trifle groggy.

Until he had spoken he hadn't realized just how badly his cardiac equipment was being shot to pieces by the naked god's ruthless archery.

The fact that the case should have appeared hopeless only fanned the flame of his ardor. He had looked into the depths of two vividly blue eyes and there read his destiny. So he told himself fiercely; whereupon, in the Rooseveltian phrase, he cast his hat into the ring.

He cared no more for obstacles than a runaway horse. His very boredom of the past few years had stored up vast reserves of energy within him, waiting only for that psychological thrill to light the fuse.

As Helen Burton turned from him with the uncomfortable feeling of one who has received a vague danger signal he paused only a moment before he again strode to her side. He was about to speak when she took the lead from him and, looking up at one of the masterpieces on the wall, said:

"Oh, this is his wonderful collection of paintings! He told me all about them."

It was what the gentlemen pugilists would call a cross-counter impinging upon the supersensitive maxillary muscles. It certainly jarred the owner of that wonderful collection and caused him to turn with an expression of astonishment to Whitney Barnes.

But that young man was intensely occupied in a vain endeavor to draw more than a monosyllable from the shrinking Sadie Burton. He missed the look and went doggedly ahead with his own task. Helen Burton repeated her remark that he had told her all about his paintings.

"Oh, has he?" responded Gladwin, dully.

"Yes, and they are worth a fortune!" cried the girl. "He simply adores pictures."

"Yes, doesn't he, though?" assented the young man in the same vacuous tones.

"And we are going to take the most valuable away with us to-night!"

Here was information to jar Jove on high Olympus. Travers Gladwin came stark awake with a new and vital interest. There was glowing life in his voice as he said:

"So you are going to take the pictures with you on your honeymoon?"

"Yes, indeed, we are."

"Won't that be nice?" was the best Gladwin could do, for he was trying to think along a dozen different lines at the same time.

"We will be gone for ever so long, you know," volunteered Helen.

"Are you going to take his collection of miniatures?" the young man asked in unconscious admiration of the colossal nerve of the gentleman who had so nonchalantly appropriated his name.

"Miniatures?" asked Helen, wonderingly.

"Yes, of course," ran on Gladwin; "and the china and the family plate--nearly two hundred years old."

"Why, I don't think he ever mentioned the miniatures, or, or"---

"That is singular," broke in Gladwin, striving to conceal the sarcasm that crept into his voice. "Strange he overlooked the china, plate and miniatures. I don't understand it, do you?" and he turned to Barnes, who had caught the last of the dialogue and shifted his immediate mental interest from the shy Sadie.

"No, I really don't, old man," said Barnes.

"Do let me show you the miniatures," Gladwin addressed Helen upon a sudden inspiration.

"That will be splendid," cried Helen. "I adore miniatures."

"They are just in the next room," said Gladwin, leading the way to a door to the left of the great onyx fireplace.

As she followed, Helen called to her cousin:

"Come along, Sadie, this will be a treat!"

But the next moment she was alone with Travers Gladwin in the long, narrow room, two windows of which, protected by steel lattice work on the inside, looked out on a side street.

The girl did not notice that as the young man preceded her he reached his hand under the screening portière and touched a spring that noiselessly swung open the heavy mahogany door and switched on half a dozen clusters of lights. Neither did she notice that Sadie had failed to follow her as her eyes fairly popped with wonder at the treasures presented to her gaze.

On one side of the room there was a long row of tables and cabinets, and almost at every step there was an antique chest. On the tables there were huddled in artistic disorder scores upon scores of gold and silver vessels and utensils of every conceivable design and workmanship. Each cabinet contained a collection of exquisite china or rare ceramics. On the walls above was the most notable collection of miniatures in America.

Travers Gladwin waited for the young girl to have finished her first outburst of admiration. Then

he said softly:

"I suppose you know that five generations of Gladwins have been collecting these few trinkets?"

"He never even mentioned them!" gasped the girl. "Why the paintings are nothing to these!"

"I wouldn't say that," chuckled Gladwin. "It would take a deal of this gold and silver junk to buy a Rembrandt or a Corot. There are a couple of Cellini medallions, though, just below that miniature of Madame de Pompadour that a good many collectors would sell their souls to possess."

"Perhaps he was preserving all this as a surprise for me," whispered the awed Miss Burton. "It is just like him. I am afraid he will be awfully disappointed now that you have shown them to me."

"Or mayhap he has forgotten all about them," said Gladwin, in a tone that caused his companion to start and color with quick anger.

"You know that is not true," she said warmly. "You know that Travers Gladwin is just mad about art. How can you say such a thing, and in such a sarcastic tone of voice?"

"Well," the young man defended himself, inwardly chuckling, "you know how his memory lapsed in regard to that heroic affair at Narragansett."

Helen Burton turned and faced him with flashing eyes.

"That was entirely different. It simply showed that he was not a braggart; that he was different from other men!"

The words were meant to lash and sting, but the passion with which they were said served so to vivify the loveliness of the young girl that Travers Gladwin could only gaze at her in speechless admiration.

When her glance fell before the homage of his regard he took hold of himself and apologized on the ground that he had been joking.

Then he made the rounds of the treasure room, pointing out and giving the history of each precious family heirloom or art object with an encyclopedic knowledge that should have caused his companion to wonder how he knew so much. Several times he slipped in the pronoun I, hoping that this might have some effect in waking Helen from the obsession that any other than he could be the real Travers Gladwin.

But alas! for his subtle efforts, the hints and innuendoes fell on deaf ears. She accepted his fund of information as a second-hand version, exclaiming once:

"What a splendid memory you have!"

Then he gave it up as a hopeless case and led the way back into the other room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SADIE BECOMES A CONSPIRATOR.

"Ah! Be careful! Don't go out there!" was the warning that had stopped Sadie Burton in full flight for the treasure room into which her cousin and Travers Gladwin had vanished.

She was more than half way to the door in obedience to Helen's command when Whitney Barnes spoke. He was sitting on the arm of one of the great upholstered chairs in a gracefully negligent attitude twirling his gold key chain about his finger. He spoke softly but with a mysterious emphasis that took hold and held the retreating miss fast in her tracks. She turned with a frightened:

"Why?"

"Because I would be all alone," he said solemnly. Then as Sadie took another hurried step forward: "Oh, no, you wouldn't desert me--you wouldn't be so cruel! How would you like to have some one desert you?"

This mystic remark caused Sadie to turn around and take a step toward him. She said timidly:

"I don't understand."

"Then I'll tell you," he said, getting on his feet and going toward her.

"No, no!" objected Sadie, and began to back away.

The young man stopped and said in his most reassuring tones:

"Fear not--I am quite harmless, I assure you. Now, I can see that you are in trouble--is that not so?"

"Oh, yes!" Sadie admitted, delighted at this new turn in his attitude. Her first disturbing

suspicion had been that he wanted to flirt.

"You see, I'm right," he pursued. "I would like to help you."

"Would you?" she breathed, with increasing confidence.

"Of course I would," he said, earnestly, whereat Sadie lost all fear.

"Then we must hurry if we are to stop it," she said in a dramatic whisper.

"Stop it--stop what?" The heir of Old Grim Barnes had launched the belief that he was about to start something. There wasn't any stop in the vocabulary of his thoughts at that minute.

"Why, the elopement!" ejaculated Sadie, exploding a little bomb that brought Whitney Barnes down out of the clouds.

"Yes, of course--to be sure--the elopement--I'd forgotten," he raced on. "Let me look at you. No, you must not turn away. I must look at you--that's the only way I can help you."

If he had to take a hand in the business of preventing an elopement he was going to combine that business with pleasure.

"You are sure you want me to help you?" he asked.

"Yes, so awfully much!" she cried.

"Then I must look at you--look at you very closely," he said, with the utmost seriousness.

"I don't understand," murmured Sadie, both pleased and frightened by his intense scrutiny.

"I'll show you," said Barnes. "Stand very still, with your arms at your side--there! (my, but she's a picture!) I've found out the first thing--I read it in your eyes."

"What!" in a stifled whisper.

"You don't approve of this elopement."

"Oh, no!" Sadie had yielded her eyes as if hypnotized.

"There, I told you so!" exulted Barnes. "You want to stop the elopement, but you don't know how to do it."

"Yes, that's perfectly true," confessed the spellbound Sadie.

"Shall I tell you how to stop it?"

"Yes, please do."

"Then sit down."

He motioned to a chair three feet from where he stood. The victim of this, his first excursion into the fields of mesmerism, tripped with bird-like steps to the chair and sat down. Barnes went easily toward her and sat down on the arm. He was as solemn about it as if his every move were part of a ritual.

"Now, please take off your glove--the left one," he commanded softly. Sadie obeyed mechanically. Barnes went on:

"Before deciding upon what you should do, I'd like to know definitely about you--if you don't mind."

"What do you want me to tell you?" asked Sadie, with a brave effort to keep her voice from running off into little tremors.

"Nothing!" replied the seer-faced Barnes. "What I want to discover you may not even know yourself. Allow me to look at your hand, please."

Sadie yielded her hand with shy reluctance, allowing the young man to hold only the tips of her fingers. Whitney Barnes bent his frowning eyes over the fluttering little hand, studied the palm for a long second, then exclaimed suddenly:

"By Jove! This is extraordinary!"

Sadie started, but her curiosity was greater than her fear.

"What?" she asked, excitedly.

"Really wonderful!" Barnes kept it up.

"What?" Sadie repeated, in the same little gasp.

"See that line?"

He had taken possession of the whole hand now and pointed with a long, ominous forefinger to the centre of the palm.

"Which line?" inquired Sadie, eagerly, getting her head very close to his as she pried into the plump, practically lineless palm.

"That one," said Barnes, impressively.

"No."

"Don't you see that it starts almost at your wrist?"

"Now I see. Yes. What of it?"

"Why it runs 'way round the bump, or, that is--the bump of Venus."

"What does that mean?" asked Sadie innocently.

"Oh, a lot. You are very affectionate--and extremely shy."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Sadie, amazed at the young man's stupendous skill.

"Now here's a cunning little line," he pursued. "That shows something too."

"Does it show how to stop the elopement?" asked Sadie, ingenuously, but making no effort to withdraw her hand.

"Yes, and it shows that you and your friend are"--- He paused to allow Sadie to fill the gap, and she did.

"Cousins--and we live with Auntie--and we've been in New York a month."

"And your cousin hasn't known Gladwin long?"

"Only two weeks." Sadie was really awed.

"That's right--two weeks; and she met him at the"---

He said to himself that here was a little game that beat any other known sport to flinders.



"NOW HERE'S A CUNNING LITTLE LINE", HE PURSUED. "THAT SHOWS SOMETHING TOO."

"At a sale of old pictures and art objects," said Sadie, supremely confident that he was reading her mind.

"A sale of pictures, of course," Barnes led her on.

"Yes, she was bidding on a picture and he whispered to her that it was a copy--a fraud, and not to buy it. That was the way they got acquainted. But he wouldn't let her tell auntie anything about him."

"Just a moment," cried Barnes. "Here's a bit of good luck. I'd almost overlooked that line."

Sadie was on fire with curiosity and looked eagerly into his eyes.

"You meet a dark man--and he prevents the elopement."

"Perhaps that's you!" exclaimed the delighted girl, withdrawing her hand and jumping to her feet.

"I'm sure it is," said Barnes, nodding his head.

"Oh, I'm so glad."

"But wait," said Barnes, going very close to her. "Please pay attention to every word I say. *Do all you can to get your cousin to change her mind; then, if she won't, tell your aunt. But don't tell her until the last minute, and--but here's your cousin.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

HELEN LEAVES AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE.

Helen Burton and Travers Gladwin were almost at the door leading from the treasure room when the young man stopped and confronted the girl, whose eyes were still bright with the anger he had kindled in them. He smiled rather sheepishly as he said:

"Suppose I were to tell you that I am Travers Gladwin and that the other Travers Gladwin with whom you think you are in love is not Travers Gladwin at all?"

Her lip curled and she regarded him scornfully. But she said nothing.

He went on into the other room, holding back the portière for her to follow.

"Why don't you answer my question?" he insisted as she passed him.

"It is much too silly," she said sharply. Then in a different tone to her cousin, who still stood by Whitney Barnes, with her color coming and going by turns:

"Oh, Sadie, why didn't you come with us? Travers has the most wonderful things."

"Then you are not going to answer my question?" Travers Gladwin asked again.

"I said it was much too silly," the girl returned with increasing vehemence. Gladwin came forward and explained to Barnes and Sadie:

"I have been asking Miss--er--I've been asking how she'd take to the idea of my being Travers Gladwin."

Helen was now thoroughly aroused as she turned:

"Why do you persist in asking such a question?"

"I was wondering," he said quickly, "whether you were in love with the man or the name."

"Have I given you the impression"---she began, haughtily, scarcely able to control her anger.

"Yes, you have," he said warmly, and with all the dramatic emphasis he could command. "I am afraid you were thinking more of that rescue at Narragansett and your desire to be free of poor Mr. Hogg than you were of--of my poor friend."

This insult was more than she could endure. She turned her back to address Whitney Barnes.

"Shall you be here when Travers returns?" she said imperiously.

"I am sure to see him before I leave," responded the young man.

"And would you be kind enough to give him a message for me?"

She had gathered up her fur piece and muff and was moving toward the door.

"Delighted," said Barnes, with a deferential bow.

"Thank you so much. I want you to tell him that I cannot avoid the opera to-night--that I have simply got to go, but that I'll get away as soon as I can and come to him directly from there."

"But you can't do that," interposed Sadie in a voice that thrilled with alarm.

"But I am going to do that," cried Helen, her face aflame and her head held high. "And now we must go--I'd no idea we'd stayed so long. Good-by and thank you."

She had taken a step toward the entrance to the hallway when Gladwin strode forward.

"You didn't say good-by to me," he said in an injured tone. Then with a sudden vehemence: "But I am glad you didn't, for we are going to meet again."

"I suppose we shall if you are here when I return," she said coldly and without looking at him.

"When you return?" he said, in quick surprise.

"Yes, when I come back here to-night," in the same disdainful, snubbing tones.

"You're going to meet Travers here to-night?" he queried, in palpable unbelief.

"Yes, I am. He wanted me to meet him at the station, but I insisted on coming here."

"And what time was it Travers wanted you to meet him here? I'd almost forgotten."

"At half-past ten," answered Helen, taken off her guard and submitting unconsciously to his cross-examination.

"Oh, yes, at half-past ten," he repeated. "That's right."

"But you," pointedly addressing Barnes, "must tell him I may be late."

"I will," acquiesced Barnes, a trifle bewildered.

"I hope you will be very late," cut in Gladwin.

"What do you mean?" she caught him up.

"I mean you have no idea what a mad thing you are going to do."

"Please"---she began icily.

"Don't be angry," he pleaded. "I'm saying this for your good."

"I don't care to hear it."

"But you've got to hear it," he cried. "To leave your aunt and run off with a man you hardly know--why you must be mad even to think of it."

"How dare you speak to me in this way?"

If ever a young lady's fur was up, as the saying is, such was the case with the enraged Helen Burton. If her eyes had been weapons to slay, Travers Gladwin would have been annihilated at a glance. But he stuck doggedly to his guns.

"Well, somebody ought to speak to you," he ran on. "Can't you understand that this man is no good--that he must be a scoundrel to ask you to do such a thing, that"---

"Stop! I forbid you to say any more--to say such horrible, cowardly things about him behind his back. You, who claimed to be his dearest friend."

Her anger was suddenly checked by a thought that flashed in her mind.

"Only a few minutes ago you said you were glad I was going to marry Mr. Gladwin, and that you would do everything in your power to help."

"And I jolly well meant it," he acquiesced, with a low bow.

"You meant it! Then how could you--oh," and she started suddenly from him, "why didn't I see it before? *You've been drinking.* Come, Sadie."

Barnes turned away with an uncontrollable snicker. Gladwin was stunned. As he saw her leaving him he made a last desperate effort:

"But just a moment. Please allow me to explain. I said I wanted you to marry Travers Gladwin, because I am"---

"I don't care why you said it," she flung at him, "because I don't think you know what you are saying."

She fairly sailed through the portières, leaving the young man staring after her in a state of utter mental collapse.

The little cousin had listened to this impassioned dialogue in the attitude of a frightened bird, standing first on one foot and then on the other, struggling with all her small nervous force to hold back the tears. As Helen disappeared, a sob escaped her and she ran forward. Barnes started after her.

"Oh, Miss Sadie--just one word!"

"Oh, don't--please don't!" she wailed over her shoulder.

"But won't you let me call on you--just once?" he pleaded, in real distress.

Sadie stopped, gave him one frightened glance, smiled through her tears and burst out:

"I shall be delighted."

Then she was gone and a moment later the door slammed.

CHAPTER XX.

MICHAEL PHELAN TO THE RESCUE.

The slamming of the front door of the Gladwin mansion struck upon the two young men as a numbing shock. They stood looking at each other with eyes that saw not and with expressions of idiotic vacancy.

Within the span of a brief half hour they had been swept along on a rushing tide of emotions. They had been thrilled and mystified, mystified and thrilled. Nor was there any relief in the reaction. There was more mystery and more thrill ahead that demanded immediate action.

Naturally the bulk of the thrill was heaped upon Travers Gladwin. He was not only fiercely convinced that he had fallen desperately in love, but the unknown beauty who had kindled this passion had revealed that she was coming that night to his home to meet and elope with a

villain and an impostor.

Here was a situation to scatter the wits of a Napoleon! It was no wonder that for a few moments his thoughts flattened themselves against an impassable barrier. Whitney Barnes was the first to revive and speak.

"Now what do you think of that?" he drew out with a long breath.

"I haven't begun to think yet," Gladwin managed to stammer. "I'm in no condition to think. I'm stunned."

"And you've travelled all over the universe in search of a thrill, eh? Now you've got one you don't know what to do with it."

While Gladwin was groping for a reply to this thrust Bateato breezed in with a swift sidelong rush, carrying a bulging portmanteau.

"Bag all packed, sair," announced the little Jap, standing at attention.

"Take it back. I'm not going now," said Gladwin, gruffly. Bateato's entrance had nipped another idea in the bud.

"You no go?" said the Jap, in surprise.

"No go--take back--unpack."

"Ees, sair; 'scuse me," and Bateato started off with his usual noiseless rush.

"Hold on," Gladwin checked him. "Wait a minute. Don't unpack it. Leave it in the hall. I may want it at a minute's notice."

"Ees, sair," and the wondering valet steamed out into the hallway and vanished.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Barnes, lighting a cigarette and offering one to his friend.

Gladwin took a turn about the room, puffing nervously at the cigarette. Coming to a sudden stop he faced Barnes and reeled off in a quick volley:

"I'm going to marry that girl! I've been all over the world, seen all kinds of 'em, and right here in my own house I find the one--the only one, on the verge of eloping with a bogus me. But I'm going to expose that man whoever he is--I'm going to rescue her from him."

"For yourself?"

"Yes, for myself, and I'm going to put him where he can never annoy her any more."

"How the deuce are you going to do all this?" asked Barnes, planking himself down into a chair.

"I don't know," said the other, "but I'm going to move the whole Western Hemisphere to do it, if necessary."

"Rather a large contract," drawled Barnes. "But I say, Travers, if that fellow is going to steal your pictures it sort of sizes up as a case for the police."

"Of course," agreed Gladwin. "I was just thinking of that. Where's that man of mine? Bateato! Bateato!"

Bateato responded with the swift obedience of a jinn rising from a miraculous bottle.

"Ees, sair," and the little son of Nippon stood stiffly at attention. "Ladies run off in autbile," he volunteered as his master hesitated.

"Never mind that--I want you to find a policeman," commanded Gladwin.

"Pleesman--where I find him?" asked Bateato in alarm, recalling his uncomfortable experience with Officer 666.

"Try a saloon," said Gladwin. "And when you've found him, bring him here quick!"

"Ladies steal something?" ventured the Jap, starting for the door. "Autbile go fast like winds."

"Some one is going to try and steal something," replied the young man. "We must see that they don't. Hurry, now!"

"Ees, sair. 'Scuse me," and Bateato vanished.

"That's the way to do it," Barnes enthused, rubbing his hands. "Get a policeman in here, and when the other Mr. Gladwin shows up nab him. Then this marriage can't come off without the aid of a prison chaplain."

The excitement that for an instant had transfigured Travers Gladwin suddenly left him. A look of dismay spread over his features.

"By Jove, Barnes!" he cried. "We can't do this!"

"Why not?" asked Barnes.

"Why? Because it would make a tremendous scandal. I'm not going to have my future wife mixed up in any public hoorah for the newspapers. Think of it--her name in the papers coupled with the name of a crook! Her picture on one side and a Rogues' Gallery photograph on the other. Impossible! The police must know nothing about it."

"I don't follow you," said Barnes. "What are you going to do--kill him and stuff him in that chest? He probably deserves it, but it would be an awfully unpleasant thing to have around the

house.”

“Shut up! Let me think,” cut in Gladwin.

Then he added with swift inspiration: “Now I’ve got it. I’ll wait outside for her to come and warn her of her danger. You stay in here and be on the lookout for the man.”

Whitney Barnes threw up his hands and ejaculated:

“Good night!” He made as if to start for the door.

“No, no, Whitney,” cried Gladwin, “we must see this thing through together. You wouldn’t want this sweet, young, innocent girl connected with a sensational robbery, would you?”

“No,” Barnes agreed soberly; “neither would I want any robber’s bullets connected with me.”

“You’re a coward!” blurted Gladwin, hotly.

“You bet I am,” acquiesced Barnes, “and I’m alive to tell it. Likewise I may have some marriage plans of my own. But keep your hair on, Travers. Let us do some real thinking, unaccustomed as we are to it, and see if we cannot devise some safer plan.”

“What plan is there?” groaned Gladwin.

“Let us think--concentrate,” suggested Barnes, posing himself with his elbow on one hand and his forehead supported on the fingers of the other. Gladwin unconsciously fell into the same pose, and so they stood, side by side, with their backs to the hallway.

“Thought of anything?” Barnes broke the silence.

“Not a --- thing,” retorted Gladwin, peevishly. A broken-legged minute had crawled by when Barnes spoke again:

“I’ve got it.”

“What?” Gladwin asked, uninspired.

“Simplest thing in the world. Why didn’t I think of it before?”

“Somehow I don’t think it’s going to be any good,” muttered Gladwin, without relinquishing his thoughtful pose.

“Listen,” said Barnes, impressively. “Go straight to the aunt and tell her the whole thing.”

Gladwin whirled around and gripped his friend’s hand.

“By Jove, you’re right, Whitney! We can make a lot of excuses for her, youth and innocence, and all that. I didn’t think you had it in you. Come on, we’ll go together!”

Barnes’s face fell and he stammered:

“But where does she live?”

“Where does she live? Don’t you know?”

“No.”

It was Gladwin’s turn to throw up his hands.

“And don’t you even know her name?”

“No.”

“Then how in blazes were you going to call on that girl?”

“By thunder! I forgot all about getting her address,” admitted the crestfallen Barnes.

Gladwin uttered a mirthless laugh and said with sarcastic scorn:

“Oh, yes, you had a fine plan! I might have suspected as much.”

“Pile it on; pile it on,” growled Barnes. “I guess the pater has me sized up about right.”

“But we must do something the police will know nothing about,” urged Gladwin. “Let’s concentrate again. Maybe a real idea will break out.”

Again the two young men wrinkled their brows in profound absorption.

They succeeded so well in their effort at concentration that neither was aware of the precipitate entry of Bateato and Michael Phelan, both of whom had sprinted a distance of two blocks. Phelan was puffing like a tugboat and stopped at the threshold of the room to catch his breath. He had prepared his mind for all manner of excitement and had burst in upon a tomb-like silence to be greeted by two inscrutable backs.

“What’s this,” he panted. “Eden Musee or a prayer-meetin’?”

Barnes glanced over his shoulder and frowned.

“Keep quiet,” he said. “We’re thinking.”

Gladwin strove to invent an excuse for getting rid of the policeman.

“What do you want?” he bluffed, as if amazed at the sudden invasion.

“What do I want?” shrilled Officer 666. “I come to find out what *you* want.”

“I don’t want anything,” said the young man with exaggerated politeness. “Thank you very much, but I don’t want anything. Good evening!”

"Good evening!" echoed Barnes, with another glance over his shoulder.

Michael Phelan turned purple. He hadn't indulged in the most exhausting sprint in six months to be made sport of.

"Which one of youse sent for me?" he rasped out.

The two young men pointed to each other, which only served to fan the flame of Phelan's wrath.

"Is one of youse Mr. Gladwin?" he gurgled.

They repeated the pantomime until Gladwin caught the fire in Phelan's eye and decided that it would be better to temporize.

"I am Mr. Gladwin," he bowed.

Phelan measured him from the ground up as he filled his lungs for another outburst.

"Why did yez send for me?" he demanded savagely. "This here little Japanaze come runnin' wild-eyed down me beat an' says there's two women been robbin' the house. What's all this monkey business?"

"Bateato is mistaken," said Gladwin, forcing a laugh.

"No, sir!" cried the Jap excitedly. "Ladies run off quick in big autbile"---

"Now wait--that's enough," Gladwin stopped him.

"You tell me find plece," persisted the Jap, who saw the terrible wrath of Michael Phelan about to flash upon him.

"That's enough," Gladwin sought to shut him up.

"You say they steal--I go saloon"---

"Don't talk any more! Don't speak again! Go back to the hotel and wait for me. I'll send for you when I want you. Stop! Not another word."

Bateato gripped his mouth with his fingers and stumbled out of the room.

Avoiding the still glowering eye of Officer 666, Travers Gladwin turned to Barnes and attempted to say casually:

"When Bateato gets an idea into his head there is no use arguing with him. There is only one thing to do--don't let him speak."

The young man started to hum a tune and strolled toward the heavily curtained window that looked out on Fifth avenue.

CHAPTER XXI.

TRAVERS GLADWIN GOES IN SEARCH OF HIMSELF.

Policeman Michael Phelan was at first undecided whether to pursue the departing Bateato and arrest him as a suspicious person or to remain on the scene of mystery and get to the bottom of what was going forward.

He chose the latter plan upon the inspiration that if he arrested a millionaire he would get his name in the paper and Rose might read of it and come to some realization of the immensity of his official dignity.

He was further urged to this course by the insolent nonchalance of the two young men. They weren't paying any more attention to him than they were to the inanimate sticks of furniture in the room.

"Well, what did yez send fer me fer?" he broke out again, hurling the words at Travers Gladwin's back.

"I thought you might like a drink," replied that young man, turning slowly and smiling upon the enraged bluecoat.

"I never touch it," shot back Phelan, "an' that's no answer to me question."

Gladwin stared at Phelan steadily a moment, his smile vanishing. As he measured the officer's height and build an idea came to him. His face lighted as he exclaimed:

"I've got a great idea! Officer, I want you to do me a little favor. How would you like to make five hundred dollars?"

If he had said four hundred dollars, or even four hundred and fifty, the effect would not have been half so great upon Michael Phelan. The mention of an even five hundred dollars, though, was the open sesame to the very depths of his emotions. Five hundred dollars represented the talisman that would lead him safe through Purgatory into the land of sweet enchantments. The fires of his wrath were instantly cooled and he said feebly:

"Are yez tryin' to bribe me?"

"Not at all, sergeant," said the young man gravely.

"I ain't no sergeant," Phelan retorted.

"All right, lieutenant," laughed Gladwin, his good humor increasing as his sudden idea took shape in his mind.

"Don't call me lieutenant," said Phelan, with a return of temper.

"Well, it's this way, captain."

"Nix on the promotion stuff," shot back Phelan, the consciousness returning that he was being kidded. "I'm patrolman and me name is Michael Phelan, and I'm onto me job--mind that!"

"No offense, officer," Gladwin hurried on. "I'm sure you're onto your job. No one could look at you and doubt that--but I'll give you five hundred dollars if you'll lend me your uniform for awhile."

"Fi--fi--uni--say, what kind of a game are youse up to?"

Two big events in Phelan's life had blazed their films upon his memory in a blinding flash. First there was Rose, and then there was that nightmare of a Coroner's case, when he had fled hatless and coatless down the stairs of a reeking east side tenement, pursued by the yells of a shrieking "corpse."

"It's no game--it's a joke," replied Gladwin.

Whitney Barnes, who had been listening eagerly and had sensed Gladwin's inspiration, chimed in:

"Yes, officer; it's a joke."

"Yez are offering me five hundred dollars for a joke?" said the flabbergasted Phelan.

"That's it," returned Gladwin. "I want to take your place; I want to become"--stepping forward to read the number on Phelan's shield--"Officer 666 for a little while."

Phelan couldn't believe his ears. Stepping to one side he said behind his hand to Barnes:

"This feller's off his dip. Don't he know that if I lent him me uniform it'd be me finish."

"That's all right," spoke up Gladwin. "I'll guarantee to protect you. No one will ever know about it. You'll never make five hundred so easy again."

"S-s-say," stammered Phelan, "what's this all about?"

"Well, I've found out that a thief is going to break in here to-night."

"A thief!" gasped the policeman.

"Yes, just for a joke, you know."

"A thief going to break in here for a joke!" yelled Phelan. "Now I know you're batty."

"Not a regular thief," the young man corrected hastily. "He's a friend of mine--and I want to be waiting in your uniform when he comes. I want to nab him. The joke will be on him, then, you know."

"All very simple, you see," added Barnes.

"Simple as--no, I don't see," snarled Phelan. "The two of yez is bugs."

"But you will see," went on Gladwin, "if you'll let me explain. In order to be a policeman I've got to have a uniform, haven't I?"

"Of course he has," urged Barnes.

"And yez are offering me five hundred dollars for a joke?"

Phelan dropped his arms limply at his side and permitted his eyes to bulge *ad lib*.

"That's it," cried Gladwin. "I assure you it is nothing serious or criminal. I just want your uniform long enough to catch my friend and I'll give you five hundred dollars for lending it to me."

"It's too big a risk," panted Phelan, producing an elaborate bandana and mopping his brow. "I won't do it."

It was manifest that Officer 666 was sorely tempted. To goad him further Travers Gladwin produced a little roll of yellow-backed bills from his pocket. Fluttering the bills deftly he stripped off one engraved with an "M" in one corner and "500" in the other. He turned it about several ways so that Phelan could study it from all angles. Then he fluttered it before Whitney Barnes and said:

"Say, Barnes, there's something really handsome about these yellow-backs, isn't there? Notice how that five and those two naughts are engraved? And it's amazing how much a slip of paper like this will buy."

This was too much for Phelan. He reached for the bill and grabbed it, stuffed it into his trousers pocket and began unbuttoning his coat. Suddenly he stopped.

"Say," he sputtered. "S'pose there should be a robbery on my beat?"

"That would be fine," said Gladwin. "I'd be a credit to you."

"Or a murder?"

"Better still."

"Oh, the risk is awful," groaned Phelan. He started to button up his coat again when Rose's taunt came back to him. This time the tempter delivered a vital blow and he tore off his uniform coat and passed it to the young man. Gladwin slipped it on over his other clothes. It fitted snugly. It just happened that the suit he wore was dark blue and his trousers matched accurately.

"Now the bonnet," he said, reaching for the uniform cap and removing it from Phelan's head.

"And now officer, your sword." He grasped the proffered belt and buckled it on with a flourish, making as natty a figure of a cub policeman as one would want to meet.

Phelan stood looking on dumbly, his face a study in conflicting emotions. Barnes's admiration of his friend's nerve was beyond power of words. When Gladwin started for the doorway, however, he called after him:

"Hey there, Travers, where are you going?"

"On duty," he responded cheerily. "And by the way, Whitney, give Mr. Phelan that tray and decanter and see that he goes down into the kitchen and stays there until my return. You remain on guard up here. I'll look after the outside. So long, mates."

"Hold on," Phelan called out feebly. "I'd like to know what the divvil it all means. I'm fair hypnotized."

"It means," said Gladwin, pausing and turning his head, "that I'm going outside to wait for myself--and if I find myself, I'll arrest myself--if both myself and I have to go to jail for it. Now, do you get me?"

"No, I'll be damned if I do!" gurgled Phelan, but the words had scarcely passed his lips when the departmental guise of Officer 666 vanished from sight and the front door slammed with a bang.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MILLIONAIRE POLICEMAN ON PATROL.

Travers Gladwin went bounding down the steps of his own pretentious marble dwelling with an airy buoyancy that would have caused Sergt. McGinnis to turn mental back handsprings had he happened to be going by on his rounds. But, fortunately, McGinnis had passed on his inspection tour shortly before Michael Phelan had been summoned by Bateato. For three hours at least Officer 666 would be supreme on his beat.

While the McGinnis contingency had never entered young Gladwin's mind it did suddenly occur to him as he strolled jauntily along that he had neglected to ask Phelan to define the circumscribed limits of his post. What if he should happen to butt into another patrolman? Certain exposure and all his plans would go flui! Then there was the danger of being recognized by some of his neighbors and friends. Ah! it came to him in a twinkling. A disguise!

"Here goes," he said aloud. "I'll jump a taxi and see if I can hunt up a hair store!"

The time was 7 P. M., with the inky darkness of night blanketing the city so far as inky darkness can blanket a metropolis.

The thoroughfare on which the young man stood was a long lane of dazzle, wherefore the nocturnal shadows offered no concealment. He cast his eyes up and down the avenue in search of a tramp motor-hack cruising in search of a fare. He had only a moment or two to wait before one of the bright yellow variety came racketing along. He stuck up his hand and waved his baton at the driver. There was a crunching of brakes and the taxi hove to and warped into the curb. The chauffeur had the countenance of a pirate, but his grin was rather reassuring.

"Say, me friend," began the young man, in an effort to assume Michael Phelan's brogue, "do you know the way to a hair store?"

"A what?" the chauffeur shot back, while his grin went inside.

"A hair store--I want a bit of a disguise fer my features--whiskers, false hair or the like."

"Did ye stop me to kid me?" snarled the chauffeur. "Ye don't need to think 'cause you got on a bull's uniform ye can hurl the harpoon into me. Or if it's a drink ye're wantin' reach in under the seat an' there's a flask. If ye meant hair oil why didn't ye say it?"

"Thanks, but 'tis no drink I'm afther," said the young man. "'Tis a ride to a hair store, an' here's a tin-spot fer yer trouble."

It was the way Travers Gladwin handled the skirts of his coat in getting at his money that

convinced the wise chauffeur that he had no real policeman to deal with. His grin came back and looped up behind at either ear.

"I getcher, Steve," he broke out, reaching for the bill. "If it's disguises ye're after hop inside an' I'll tool youse over to Mme. Flynn's on Avenue A."

To demonstrate to his uniformed fare that speed laws in the greater city of New York fail to impose any manner of hamper upon the charioteering of the motor-driven hack, the chauffeur of this canary-colored taxi scampered across town at a forty-mile-an-hour clip, during which Patrolman Gladwin failed to familiarize himself with the quality of the cab's cushions. But it was not a long ride and there was some breath left in him when the cab came to a crashing stop.

The young man was on the point of opening the door when a voice stopped him.

"Kape inside, ye boob, an' pull the blinds down. There's coppers on every corner. Now, what is it ye want in the way o' whiskers or hair? Ye can slip me the change through the crack."

"What's the prevailin' style?" asked Gladwin, with a laugh. "Are they wearin' brown beards?"

"They are not," mumbled the chauffeur. "I guess a wee bit mustache an' a black wig will do ye, an' if ye want I'll get ye a pair of furry eyebrows."

"Fine," cried the young man, poking a \$20 bill out through the crack in the door, "and don't be long." The door slammed and a great stillness clapped down, broken only by the running of the taximeter, which seemed to be equipped with a motor of its own.

The millionaire cop sat back luxuriously and inhaled a deep breath.

"Gad!" he exclaimed to himself, "I'm really beginning to live. Nothing but thrills for four hours and more and larger ones coming."

Presently the chauffeur returned, opened the door a few inches and shoved in a small package.

"Ye'll have to paste 'em on in the dark," he said. "Or ye can light a match. Ye'll find a wee mirror in the bundle. Now where'll I drive yez?"

"Back to me fixed post," said Gladwin, "only take it easy while I put me face on straight."

"If ye don't git it on straighter nor your brogue," chuckled the chauffeur, "it'll not decave a blind man."

In another instant the return journey was under way at reduced speed.

Travers Gladwin first tried on the wig. It was three sizes too large and he had to discard it. Next he had some trouble in deciding which was the mustache and which the eyebrows. He had burned his fingers pretty badly before he made the selection and likewise he had singed one of the eyebrows.

But he managed to plaster them all on before the cab stopped and after one glance in the little mirror he was confident the disguise would answer.

When he stepped out of the taxi, at almost the very spot where he had boarded it, he felt that a big weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"How do you like me?" he asked the chauffeur, gayly. "Is it an improvement?"

"I wouldn't say yis nor no to that," said the chauffeur, "but 'tiz a disguise, an' that's what ye were wantin'. Thim eyebrows is grand."

"Thanks," laughed Officer 666, "an' here's a wan hundred dollar bill which asks ye to forget me uniform, me number an' me face."

"'Tiz done," agreed the chauffeur, tucking away the bill, "on'y take a tip from a wise gink an' keep deep in the shadders. An' whin ye pinch your frind don't let him holler too loud."

The yellow taxi was gone with a rush, leaving Gladwin to wonder at the amazingly shrewd guess of its pilot.

"When I pinch me frind," he murmured. "'Twas just what I said to Phelan. Why"---

He was gazing after the taxicab when from the opposite direction there suddenly rolled into view a vast touring car with a familiar figure at the wheel, and alongside the familiar figure a very pretty girl.

The car was barely rolling along, while its two occupants were talking earnestly, their heads as close together as was possible under the circumstances.

"Johnny Parkinson, as I'm alive!" uttered Travers Gladwin. "Me old college chum, and as per usual--making love. Yis, me grinning chauffeur frind, here's where we make a pinch an' test Mme. Flynn's eyebrows. Officer, do your duty!"

Out he stepped into the roadway and raised his nightstick.

The big car came to a sudden stop and the two occupants stared angrily at the cause of the interruption.

"I arrest yez in the name o' the law," cried Patrolman Gladwin, scowling so fiercely that one of the eyebrows was in danger.

"What's that?" snorted the young aristocrat.

"You're me pris'ner," said Gladwin, easily. "I arrest ye fer breaking the speed laws--racin' on the aven-oo."

"It's an outrage!" cried the pretty passenger. "We were scarcely crawling, Johnny."

"You must be joking, officer," said Johnny Parkinson, not very belligerently, for he had a bad record for speeding and wasn't sure that some earlier offense was not involved.

"I'm not jokin'," replied Gladwin, walking to the door of the tonneau and opening it, "and ye'll oblige me by drivin' to the police station." He got in and lolled back cozily in the cushions.

Johnny Parkinson let in the clutch and rolled northward. This was the strangest "pinch" of his experience and he didn't know just what to make of it. After he had gone a few blocks he turned on his captor-passenger and said:

"Which station shall I drive to?--I'm sure there must be some mistake."

"There's no mistake," responded Gladwin, fairly screaming with joy inside at the bewildered and frightened look of his friend. "As for police stations, take your pick. I ain't particular. Drive round the block a couple o' times an' make up your mind."

Johnny Parkinson turned the first corner and then turned again into Madison avenue. Gladwin could hear the couple on the front seat whispering excitedly, the girl almost in hysterics.

"You've simply got to do something, Johnny," she was saying. "You know if we get our names in the paper father will be furious. Remember what he said about the last time you were arrested for speeding."

Running along Madison avenue, Johnny Parkinson slowed down, turned again to the uniform in the back seat and said tremulously:

"Can't we compromise this, Officer? I"---

"Not on the aven-oo, Mr. Parkinson. You've got too bad a record. But if ye'll run the machine over into Central Park where there ain't so many sergeants roamin' round we might effect a sittlemint."

A smile of great gladness illuminated the features of Johnny Parkinson. He let in the clutch with a bang and it was only a matter of seconds before the ninety horsepower car glided in through the Seventy-second street entrance to Central Park and swung into the dark reaches of the East Drive. Slowing down again the young man at the wheel turned and said anxiously:

"The smallest I've got is a century and I really need some of that."

"That's aisy," rejoined Gladwin. "Sure'n I change hundred dollar bills ivry day. Slip me the paper an' here's a fifty, which is lettin' ye off aisy, seein' ye're an ould offinder."

The transfer of bills was made swiftly, whereupon Gladwin commanded:

"Now run me back to me peg post an' drop me off, on'y take it slow an' gradual or I might have to pinch yez again."

A few minutes later Gladwin heard the young girl say passionately:

"Oh, Johnny, how could you give him the money? He's no better than a thief. I hope you've taken his number."

"It wouldn't do any good, dearest," said Johnny, sadly. "They're all in together and I'd only get the worst of it. But did you notice, Phyllis, that he looks a lot like Travers Gladwin?"

"Impossible!" retorted the girl. "Travers Gladwin is good looking, and this man's nothing but an Irish monster."

The girl was about to speak again when she was sure she heard muffled laughter behind her. Then the car sped on into the avenue and just missed colliding with a Fifth avenue motor 'bus. Officer 666 was put down a block from his own home and resumed the patrolling of the immediate precincts of the Gladwin mansion. His only parting salute from Johnny Parkinson's car was a flashing glance of contempt from the girl, whose identity he strove in vain to place.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD GRIM BARNES GETS A THRILL.

The precipitate departure of Travers Gladwin left Whitney Barnes and the shirt-sleeved Michael Phelan staring blankly at each other. The unfrocked policeman was anything but an imposing figure and the contortions of distress in his rubicund countenance were grotesque enough to kindle the sense of humor in a far less volatile mind than that of Whitney Barnes. His smile came to the surface and spread out in full blossom. But it failed to find reflection in the features of Mrs. Phelan's son.

"What the divvil are ye grinnin' at?" snarled Phelan. "Ye wouldn't see no fun in it if it mint your job an' your pension an' your silf-respect. Now, what is it all about?"

"There you have me, officer," responded the young man, lightly. "The riddle is dark on all four sides. You and I are in the same boat--guardians of the castle against the mysterious foe. While you guard the moat from the kitchen I will operate the portcullis."

"Talk sinse, will yez?" hissed Phelan. "What in blazes has moats an' portcollars to do with it?"

"Only in a way of speaking," laughed Barnes. "But calm yourself, Mr. Phelan, my friend is both wise and discreet. He will do no dishonor to your cloth, and together we will see that you suffer no material damage in this life. I am unable to explain further without uttering more confusion, so kindly take yonder tray down into the kitchen. That little door on the extreme right I believe opens the way to the lower regions. I am sure Bateato left the lights on."

"May the blessed saints presairve ye if it's a trap ye're riggin' fer Michael Phelan," breathed that gentleman, shaking his head dubiously. "'Tis not a step I'll go down into that kitchen till yez lead me the way, and if there's any more ravin' maniacs down in them quarters I warn ye it's shootin' I'll be after doin'."

And Phelan patted the bulge in his hip pocket as he swung around.

Barnes led the way through the long, narrow corridor to the rear of the house, while Phelan followed, muttering and grumbling every inch of the way. There was no further conversation between them while they investigated the elaborate quarters below stairs, and at last Phelan ceased his mutterings and accepted from Barnes an armful of cook books with which to regale himself until he was summoned to resume his uniform.

Returning to the big silent rooms above, Whitney Barnes was utterly at a loss how to occupy himself. The thundering stillness got on his nerves and he found himself thinking of a dozen different things at once. But as idea pursued idea the image of the shy and winsome Sadie persisted in intervening.

So he dropped Travers Gladwin, or rather the two Travers Gladwins, Helen, Phelan and all the others from his mind and gave himself up to the beatific contemplation of the picture that was most soothing to his spirits.

For a while he lolled back in one of the great chairs, shut his eyes and revolved pleasant visions. Suddenly he thought of his father and sprang to his feet.

"By Jove! I'll break the news to the pater," he cried. "There's a telephone somewhere in this house, and I'll call him up at his club."

He fairly danced out into the hallway, switching on lights wherever he could find a button to press. Presently he located the phone in a secluded alcove and slumped down on a divan with the instrument in his lap.

As a matter of fixed routine, it happened that this particular hour found Joshua Barnes, mustard magnate, settled down to his cigar and coffee, in which he found immense comfort after a hearty meal. To be disturbed at this most luxurious moment of the day was, to a man of his temperament, about as pleasant a sensation as being stung by a rattlesnake.

He sent the club attendant back to the phone with a savage growl and the message to his son to call him up in an hour or to come to the club in person. The attendant crept back with the report that Barnes junior insisted that there could be no delay--that he had a vastly important matter to report on.

Old Grim Barnes flung down his cigar, gulped his coffee till he choked and stamped off to the telephone booth.

"Well?" he bellowed.

--That you, pater--sorry to disturb you, but--

--Of course it's important and no damn nonsense about it, I---

--No, I haven't been arrested and am not in a police station.

--Then what the devil---

--No devil, nothing of the sort. On the contrary, quite the opposite! I've called you up to report progress---

--You know better than that, dad. I've only had two drinks.

--I'd better take four more and sober up? Now, Father Barnes, will you oblige me by cooling off for an instant? You recall that this afternoon you gave me a year within which to find a wife. Well, I've found one already.

--Now you know I'm intoxicated? Was my voice ever soberer--now listen.

--You won't listen? But you must. This is all up to you. You commanded. I obeyed. Say, dad, she's an angel. I'm madly in love with her.

--Who is she? Well, er, I really don't know--that is, her first name is Sadie. I---

--Sadie what? Sadie Omaha--I mean she lives in Omaha.

--What is her last name and who are her people? To tell you the truth I haven't found that out yet. I---

--I'm an ass?--a blankety, blank ass? Just wait till you see her! I met her up at Travers Gladwin's, and---

--Travers is in Egypt! No, yes, of course he is, but---

The final outburst of paternal expletive fairly hurled Whitney Barnes from the phone.

"There, by thunder! He's rung off in a rage."

"There's the ungrateful parent for you!" he muttered as he made his way back to Gladwin's drawing room. "Here I've gone and broken my neck to fall in love for him and that's all the thanks I get for it. Well, I'll marry her in spite of him, if he doesn't leave me a dollar. I could starve in a garret with her, and if I got too dreadfully hungry I could eat her. Hi, ho! but, say, Mr. Whitney Barnes, you had better switch off some of these lights. This house isn't supposed to be occupied."

He left just one heavily shaded bronze lamp abeam. Then he carefully drew all the curtains across the windows and tiptoed about the room with the air of a sinister conspirator. He stopped in front of the great, mysterious-looking chest to one side of the entrance to the hallway, lifted the heavy lid and looked in.

"Here's where we will put our dead," he said, with a lugubrious grin, let down the lid softly and crossed abruptly to the roomiest and coziest chair beside the curtained window. After another sweeping glance about the room he stretched his arms and yawned.

"Reckon I better sleep off that jag the pater presented me over the wire," he chuckled, and down he slid into the soft upholstery, raising his long legs upon another chair and sighing with deep contentment. His eyes roved about the room for a moment, when he smiled suddenly and quoted:

Why, let the stricken deer go weep;
The hart ungalled play,
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
So runs the world away.

And upon the suggestion of the immortal bard he chose the sleeper's end of it and passed away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNTIE TAKES THE TRAIL.

"Mix a tablespoonful of corn starch with a quarter of a cupful of water. Stir this into a cupful of boiling water, and boil for two minutes; then add the juice and rind of a lemon and a cupful of sugar, and cook three minutes longer. Beat an egg very light, and pour the boiling mixture over it. Return to the fire and cook a minute longer, stirring all the while--a most tasty lemon sauce"---

"T' 'ell wit' these limon sauces!" exploded Michael Phelan, hurling the book across the room and bounding from his chair. "Sure 'n I'll niver be able to look a limon in the face agin. Limon, limon, limon--these blame books are filled wit' 'em. 'Tis a limon I am mesilf an' all fer a limon colored bill. But I'll not stand it a minute longer, shut down into this tomb wit' nothin' but mice fer comp'ny. Wurra! Wurra! Rose O'Neil, but your blue eyes an' your black hair an' your divilish smiles have spelled me finish."

Phelan wrung his hands and took a turn around the room. Now and again he stopped and shook his fist at the ceiling, and at last, beside himself, he made a rush for the door that led to the stairway. Opening a crack, he listened. Nothing but heavy silence beat down on him from above and he shivered. He looked back into the kitchen and his eye fell on the pile of cookbooks. With a muttered oath he flung himself through the doorway and crept upstairs.

He had to feel his way through the narrow slit of a corridor above, and it was with an immense sigh of relief that he opened the door and stepped into the great drawing room he had left. In the dim light of the one glowing lamp he made out Whitney Barnes deep in the embrace of a great chair and sonorously asleep.

"So that's the way he's kapin' watch!" hissed Phelan through his teeth, as he fairly pounced across the room. First he seized the young man's feet and threw them from their resting place to the floor, exclaiming as he did so:

"Here you--wake up!"

"Yes, dear," mumbled the young man in his sleep, "I could abide with you always."

"Don't yez be afther dearin' me," snarled Phelan. "Wake up!"

Barnes opened his eyes and asked thickly:

"Wassa masser."

"What are yez doin' there?" cried Phelan.

"What am I doing here," rejoined Barnes, now wide-awake and getting on his feet. "Why, I'm

keeping watch at the window--on guard as it were."

"On guard, is it?" snorted Phelan. "On guard an' snorin' like a bazoo. 'Tis a fine night watchman ye'd make. But, say, hain't ye seen nothin' o' Mr. Gladwin since?"

"Now, I told you, Officer," returned Barnes severely, "that I would let you know just as soon as he returned. I have been keeping guard here, and no one could enter the house without my knowing it. You will kindly return to the kitchen and wait."

"An' you got no word from him?" asked Phelan, in manifest distress.

"No," with emphasis.

"Oh, my! oh, my!" complained Phelan bitterly. "Sure this is the worst muddle I ever got meself into! The sergeant will find him in that uniform, sure. It'll cost me me job, that's what it will! How late is it now?"

Barnes consulted his watch.

"Five minutes past ten."

"Howly Moses! If I ever get out of this scrape I pity the mon that offers me money fer the lind o' me uniform agin. I'll grab him by the"---

A sharp ring at the doorbell cut him short and wrote another chapter of tragedy in his countenance.

"Hello! there's some one at the door," spoke up Barnes. "You'd better go and see who it is, Officer."

"Me!" gurgled Phelan. "Me! an' walk into the arms o' Sergeant McGinnis. Let 'em stay out, whoever it is, or yez go yersilf."

"All right," said Barnes, "and in case it should be your friend McGinnis you better go and hide in the kitchen, like a brave officer. I'll let you know when it's time to come out."

Phelan did not budge as Barnes left the room, but stood muttering to himself: "How the divvil did I iver let meself in fer this thing--I dunno! That's what love does to yez--a plague on all women! If"---

"Helen, Helen, where are you?" cried a shrill feminine voice that seemed to clutch the very heart of Michael Phelan with a grip of ice.

"Howly murther! What's that?" he breathed, backing away from the door.

"Help! Murder! Police!" was borne in on him in even more agonized tones, and before he could move another step Mrs. Elvira Burton burst into the room--flushed and wild-eyed--in the throes of one of her famous fits of hysterics.

Phelan took a backward leap as she came toward him, and she yelled:

"Stop! stop! Where's my niece?"

With his eyes almost out on his cheeks Phelan managed to articulate:

"What, ma'am?"

"You know what I mean--don't deny it!" Mrs. Burton shrielled.

"I don't know what yez're talkin' about," protested Phelan, backing toward the doorway that led to the kitchen.

The hysterical woman stopped, struggling for breath. When she could speak again she said fiercely:

"Who are you?"

"I--I"--- Phelan began.

"Tell me who you are or I'll have you arrested--I'll call the police."

"Oh, for the love of hiven, don't call the police!" begged Phelan, still backing toward the door.

"Then tell me what you are doing here."

"I'll answer no questions," cried Phelan. With a desperate backward leap he gained the narrow doorway behind and vanished. He pulled the door shut and clung to the knob, hearing the muffled demand hurled at him:

"Here! Come back here! Helen! Helen! I want my niece! Oh, Helen, come to auntie!"

Then Barnes and the other pretty ward of the distraught Mrs. Burton entered the room. The young man had stopped Sadie in the hallway to ask a few questions and endeavored to soothe the frightened girl. He had taken possession of her hand again and still held it as he led her to the door of the drawing room.

They did not attempt to enter until after the precipitate disappearance of Michael Phelan. As Mrs. Burton stood looking helplessly at the closed door, her ample bosom heaving and her breath coming in short hysterical gasps, Barnes was whispering to Sadie:

"Ah, Miss Sadie, I can't tell you how overjoyed I am at seeing you again. And so that's your auntie--fancy that chap refusing to meet her! Why"---

That was as far as he got. Auntie suddenly wheeled round and caught sight of him.

"Ah! Gladwin!" she screamed and made a rush for him.

With all his characteristic aplomb and insouciance Whitney Barnes was unable to face such a rush with any degree of calmness.

"No! no! a mistake!" he retorted and sought to sidestep.

Mrs. Burton was too quick for him and seized his arm in an iron grip.

"Where is Helen? What have you done with her?" she demanded in the same wild tones.

"I-I-I d-d-don't know," stammered Barnes.

"You have hidden her somewhere and you must give her up," stormed the woman. "You're a scoundrel--you're a kidnapper--you're a wretch."

She flung Barnes from her with all her strength and he slammed against the wall. She was about to charge upon him again when Sadie rushed between them.

"Oh, auntie," she cried. "This is not Mr. Gladwin."

"Of course he isn't," chimed in Barnes, trying to shake himself together again. "He isn't Mr. Gladwin at all."

"Then who are you?" cried Mrs. Burton.

"Oh, he's some one else," Sadie assured her.

"Yes, you bet I am," continued Barnes, striving his best to appear his usual jaunty self. "I'm some one else entirely different--I-I'm not Gladwin in the least."

"What are you doing here?" shot out Mrs. Burton.

"Ah, that's it," he responded. "I'm on guard--keeping watch!"

"I knew it! I knew it!" and the shrill voice rose to a plangent pitch again. "You have hidden her away. Helen! Helen!"

"Now, now, now--my dear lady," broke in Barnes, soothingly.

"I'm not your dear lady," she flashed on him.

"My dear auntie"--Mrs. Burton's hysteria was becoming contagious--"I beg your pardon," he added hastily, "your niece, Miss Helen, is not here. I've been watching for hours, and she's not here--no one is here."

"That shirt-sleeved man is here--and you're here!"

"But, auntie, he's a friend of Mr. Gladwin's," interposed Sadie.

"Ah, ha! I knew it!" screamed Mrs. Burton. "He's in the plot." And again she plunged for him, crying, "You're his friend--you're helping him to steal my niece. But you shan't--I'll prevent it--I'll search the house. Come, Sadie!"

Barnes dodged skilfully and permitted Mrs. Burton to pass out into the hallway. Sadie was about to follow when the young man stopped her.

"But I must go with auntie," Sadie objected.

"Never mind auntie now. I want to tell you about your cousin."

"Then you've seen her?"

"No."

"But you know where she is?"

"No."

"Then what can you tell me about her?"

"Everything! Sit down, please. Remember you asked me to help you and I promised to do so."

Mrs. Burton had managed to switch on the lights in the big reception room back of the hallway and was searching behind curtains, under books, behind pictures and in innumerable other places, after the manner of hysterical women.

"I said I would help you, you know," ran on Barnes.

"Yes," and Sadie looked up into his eyes confidently.

"Do you know why I promised?"

"No. Why did you?"

Barnes bent down toward her and said with all the ardor he could command:

"Because from the moment I saw you I became your slave. When I saw how distressed you were about your cousin this evening my heart went out to you--the instant you left I decided to act and I've been acting ever since."

"Oh, how kind--what have you done?"

"I've watched."

"Watched?"

"Yes, watched. You don't understand that, but it's a very serious matter. If you only knew how

serious this whole thing is you'd realize how I am trying to help you, and the risk I am taking."

"Oh, how noble of you! How brave you are!" and if Mrs. Burton had waited another moment before returning to the room she would have had another case for hysterics on her hands entirely separate and independent of Helen's elopement.

"I can't find her--I don't believe she's in the house," wailed Mrs. Burton.

Barnes regarded her dumbly for a moment and then said slowly and ponderously:

"My dear lady, I assure you that she is not in the house. If you'll only listen a moment"---

"I won't listen," Mrs. Burton snapped him up.

Sadie jumped to her feet and rallied to Barnes's defense:

"But, auntie, this gentleman has been doing everything he can to help us--everything. He's been watching."

"Watching? Watching what?" demanded auntie, suspiciously.

"Ah, that's it! What? What haven't I been watching--for hours?" cried Barnes.

"But what have you been watching for?" Mrs. Burton shrilled.

"For hours"---

"What?"

"I mean for yours--and Miss Sadie's sake, and now if you'll wait here and watch with me"---

"Now I see it all," stormed Mrs. Burton, shaking her hand at Barnes wrathfully. "You want to keep us here. Helen and that scoundrel have gone and you want to prevent our following them."

"No, auntie, he's trying to help us," sobbed Sadie.

"He's lying to you, child," said Mrs. Burton, shooting vindictive glances at Barnes. "Don't you know he's a friend of that wretch Gladwin? But they can't hoodwink me. I know what to do now! Helen is not of age--I'll swear out a warrant--I'll have him arrested for abduction, a State prison offense."

"No, no, no," implored Barnes, in real alarm, "you must not do that. That will make the whole thing public, and that is just what Gladwin is trying to avoid."

"Don't you suppose I know that," sneered Mrs. Burton. "He's probably a bigamist. He may have a dozen wives living--the beast!"

"But won't you understand," insisted Barnes. "He's trying to save her, privately."

"Now, what are you talking about?"

Mrs. Burton regarded him as if she had suddenly realized he was a raving maniac. And by way of justifying her inspiration he stumbled on blindly:

"I don't know--you see, it's this way. Gladwin and I only found it out this afternoon--quite by accident. And we decided to save her."

"That's enough--stop!" cried Mrs. Burton. "You're talking all this nonsense to detain us. But I won't stay a minute longer. Come, Sadie, we will go to the police station. I'll never rest until I have that monster in jail."

And with another dagger glance at Barnes she swept her niece and herself out of the room and out of the house to the waiting automobile.

Barnes gripped his forehead in both hands to steady his reeling brain.

"Isn't that just like a woman," he complained. "After explaining explicitly she's going to have him arrested. But, by Jove! I must find Travers and warn him that the police are on his track."

Seizing his hat and stick he rushed out into the night, just in time to see Mrs. Burton's--or rather Jabez Hogg's--big car glide away from the curb and shoot down the avenue like a vast projectile.

CHAPTER XXV.

PHELAN MEETS HIS UNIFORM AGAIN.

About the time the Gladwin mansion was ringing with the shrill staccato outbursts of Mrs. Elvira Burton, the owner of that luxurious dwelling was leaning against the Central Park wall a few blocks away engaged in earnest conversation with a small boy.

"You ought to be in bed," the young man was saying, severely, looking down at the lad and noting how thinly he was clad and yet how little he appeared to suffer from the sting of the chill night air.

"Bed nuttin'," responded the boy, curtly. "I'm lookin' fer me dog. Did yez seen him go by--he's a t'oroughbred an' lost one ear battlin' with a bull."

"Oh, so you're her brother, then," laughed Gladwin.

"Who's brudder?" asked the boy, suspiciously.

"May's," said Gladwin, "or I should say the brother of Miss May Henny."

"Hully gee!" ejaculated the boy. "Did dat kid skin out too after me an' the old man tellin' her to stay in bed an' shut up her bellerin'?"

"Yes," said Gladwin, "and the young lady, with my aid, found the valuable animal you are searching for--a black dog with a white spot over the right eye and no tail."

"Hully gee!" cried the boy, ecstatically. "She found him, eh? Well, who'd a-t'ought it, an' me lookin' fer him tree hours. Where did she find him, officer? His name's Mike--named after me old man's boss what bites nails."

"We found him in the park in company with a disreputable friend," said Gladwin.

"A yaller mut?" asked the boy, with a contemptuous emphasis on the *mut*. "Dat's the janitor's dog an' he's nottin' but a tramp. I wisht he'd fall in de river an' get et by a catfish."

"I wouldn't wish him all that hard luck," laughed Gladwin, "for he had a large bone he was sharing with Mike. I was watching them over the park wall when May came along. I sent them all, and the bone, home in a taxicab."

"In a which?" ejaculated the boy, while his eyes popped.

"In a taxi," said Gladwin, lightly.

"Aw, say," and the little chap's jaw fell, "now I know you're kiddin'. Where'd May git the price of a taxi, an'---"

"Oh, I arranged all that," the uniformed mystery explained reassuringly, "and if you'd like I'll call one for you. You look pretty tired. I guess you've walked a good many miles on the trail of Mike."

The youngster tried to speak, but could not. The very thought of a ride in a taxicab froze his brain. Gladwin took him by the hand and led him to the curb.

"Now, would you prefer a yellow or a red one?" he asked. "There's all kinds going by."

"Yaller," cried the boy. "I likes them best."

They had only a moment to wait, when one of the mystic yellow hue cruised round a corner and came toward them. Gladwin hailed it and the chauffeur stopped with a wondering look at the pair.

Gladwin had a bill ready in his hand and passed it up to the chauffeur.

"Take this boy over to No. 287 East Eightieth street," commanded Gladwin, "and whatever you've got left out of the tenspot above what the meter registers, split the change with the boy. And as for you son, patting the urchin on the head, you keep your eye peeled on the meter."

"Gee! Will I?" responded the boy, and as Gladwin opened the door he hopped in and took up a perch where he could best observe the fascinating operations of the register.

The chauffeur, a bullet-headed, cross-eyed individual, squinted at the bill half a dozen times before he stowed it away in his pocket and set the meter. Then he made a swift, fierce scrutiny of Travers Gladwin's face, shook his head, swallowed a mouthful of oaths, threw in the clutch and spurted diagonally for the cross street.

As he vanished, the uniformed similitude of Officer 666 consulted his watch, made out that it was almost 10.30 and strode rapidly in the direction of his home. He wore a smile that was fairly refulgent.

"Wouldn't have missed this night patrol for a hundred thousand," he said inwardly--"and they say that the life of a patrolman is a monotonous drudgery."

Arriving at the stoop of his home he reconnoitered the avenue in both directions and then looked up at the black windows of the house. A sudden lull had come upon the neighborhood and there seemed not a soul stirring. He sped lightly up the stoop and let himself in. He was surprised to find the lights burning brilliantly in the drawing-room and no sign of Barnes. The heavy curtains, he saw, were carefully arranged to prevent the merest ray of light from showing outside. He took the further precaution, however, of turning off all but the single globe in one lamp.

He speculated on the disappearance of Barnes until he heard a stealthy step approaching through the corridor that led to the kitchen. Without noise he glided to the window and concealed himself behind the curtains.

He had scarcely hidden himself when the hinged panel that answered for a door opened slowly and the countenance of Michael Phelan protruded itself into the room. The Phelan shoulders and embonpoint, still in negligee, followed. Taking a cautious step forward he uttered behind his hand:

"Pst! Pst! Hey, youse there!"

There was no answer, and Phelan worked his head round like a wary weazel, muttering:

"Who was that woman, I wonder? She must have took that Slim Jim away with her. Musha! Musha! If they should call the police. Bad cess to that feller an' his five hundred dollar bill. Murther! Murther! I'm done fer!"

Travers Gladwin had stepped out of the folds of the curtain.

"Hey, there!" he blurted. "What are youse up to?"

"Howly Saint Pathrick! I'm gone now, sure!" groaned Phelan, and trembled where he stood.

"Come, come, Officer 666," laughed Gladwin, "I'm only your ghost."

Phelan exhaled a tremendous sigh of relief.

"The Lord be praised if it ain't yez!" he exclaimed, delightedly. "But where did ye get that disguise?"

"At a hair store--Madam Flynn's on Avenue A--do you like it?" laughed the young man. "I didn't want any of my friends or neighbors to recognize me, you know."

"But fer the love o' heaven where have yez been all the time?" asked Phelan, sinking into a chair and breathing hard.

"Patrolling my beat--I mean your beat," returned the young man, "and keeping my eye out for my friend the burglar. Oh, I've had quite a party. When I got hungry I sent to the Plaza for lunch and sat on the park wall and ate it. And, by the way, I saw a friend of mine coming along in an automobile and I arrested him for speeding."

"What!" Phelan exploded, jumping to his feet and turning white as his boiled shirt.

"Yes, nabbed him for breaking the speed limit," Gladwin nodded, leaning back against a table and lighting a cigarette.

"Fer, fer, fer breakin' the speed limit; fer, fer--yez made an arrest?"

"Exactly! He was going so slow he deserved to be arrested, and what's more, he was making love to a pretty girl without shame. I got in and told him to drive me to the station."

Phelan threw up his hands with a groan.

"An' did yez take him to the station?"

"How could I?" chuckled Gladwin. "I didn't know where it was--that is, your station--so I told him most any would do. We rode about a bit and as he didn't seem anxious to be locked up, I compromised for fifty dollars. It was really quite simple, Phelan, and if I'd only had more time I might have got back that five hundred."



"GIVE ME ME UNIFORM AN' LET ME GIT OUT OF HERE."

"You've lost me me job--that's what you've done!" moaned Phelan, while his brain reeled with pictures of police headquarters, trial rooms and ruthless commissioners. "Come, give me me uniform," he cried, with a sudden accession of passion.

"What's that?" asked the young man, quickly, his grin vanishing.

"Me uniform!" rasped Phelan, with a rush toward the young man. "Give me me uniform an' let me git out of here."

Gladwin dodged around the table, protesting:

"No, no--not yet. The burglar--that is, my friend--will be here any moment."

"Your friend?" Phelan stopped, again a prey to bewilderment.

"Yes, yes--I explained all that before. The one I'm playing the joke on. You don't suppose I'm going to take it off now, do you?"

"Yez can bet your life, yez are," roared Phelan, with another savage rush round the table. "I've had enough of this, an' too much!"

"Now, just a minute," pleaded Gladwin. "I assure you everything is all right, and I'm not going to leave the house again. If anything happens so you need your uniform I'll be right here where you can get it. I'm not going to leave the house. Tell me, where's Barnes?"

"Who?" said Phelan, more calmly, and pausing in his pursuit.

"My friend--the one I left here."

"I dunno--there was a ring at the bell here a while ago and in come a wild woman and"---

"Great Scott! I hope my friend wasn't scared off! If that fellow was to meet her here at 10.30--why, it's after that now!"

"Here! Phelan, quick--help me put these covers on the chairs and things. Over there in the corner, back of the chest. He mustn't know that anybody's been here. Hurry, man; hurry! we haven't a second to spare."

Phelan submitted to the breathless commands as if he were hypnotized, puffing and blowing like a porpoise as he struggled to slip the linen covers over the chairs. Gladwin worked at top speed, too; and just as he was covering the great chest he gave a start and held up his hand.

"Sh!" he whispered. "There's a motor stopping outside. You go down into the kitchen and be ready to come up if you hear me whistle."

"But ye'll promise yez won't leave the house with them clothes," gasped Phelan.

"No, no--certainly not. Be quick now--I'll switch off this light and step out on the balcony. Close that door tight after you and be sure you switch out the lights in the back hall."

Gladwin only waited for the disappearance of Phelan and the soft closing of the door when he plunged the room into darkness. He could hear the click of a key in the front door lock as he groped his way to the window curtains and pressed back into the semi-circular recess that led out onto a window balcony. As he did so he unlatched the heavily grilled balcony window, drew out his penknife and slit a peephole in the curtain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GLADWIN MEETS HIMSELF.

Standing as stiff and immovable as if he had been turned to stone, Travers Gladwin peered with one eye through the narrow aperture he had slashed in the heavy brocade portière. Still gazing into inky darkness he could hear the cautious tread of two persons. His senses told him that one of the visitors was a heavy, sure-footed man and that the other was of lighter build and nervously wary. His deductions ceased instantly as a flash of light crossed his vision.

For a moment the concealed watcher saw nothing save the incisive ray of light that cut like a knife thrust through the darkness; then as he followed the shaft of light to its source he made out the silhouette of a man in evening dress--a white shirt front, square shoulders that branched off into the nothingness of the cloaking shadows and a handsome, sharp profile that lost itself in the gloom of a silk hat.

He also made out a cane from which the flashlight beamed. It was a new device to the experience of Travers Gladwin, and he watched it with the same fascination that a man is wont to manifest in the gleam of a revolver muzzle that suddenly protrudes itself from the mysterious depths of night.

The wielder of this smart burglar's implement did not move as he gashed the darkness with the ray of light, and to Gladwin he seemed inordinately calm. His companion was somewhere behind him, groping, and did not come into the picture until suddenly he found the push button in the wall and switched on the full glare of the electroliers suspended from the ceiling.

Gladwin saw and recognized. He drew in a deep breath of surprise.

It was Watkins, the thieving butler he had discharged in London. His attention did not linger on

this familiar soft-shuffling tool of the master thief, however, but snapped back to the big, good looking young man with the branching shoulders and erect, confident carriage.

Used as he was to immaculate exteriors, Travers Gladwin had never seen a better groomed man. He had never seen a man with a quicker eye and more unconscious grace of movement.

It was no wonder that bitter envy gnawed his heart for a little while as there rose again before him the picture of that bewilderingly pretty girl and her passionate insistence that she would elope with "Travers Gladwin" in spite of any and all obstacles.

That underneath all these splendid sheathings the man had the mean spirit of a deceiver and a robber never entered the young man's head.

But presently things began to happen with such avalanching rapidity of action that there was not even a second to spare for speculation upon the vast gap between their social positions.

The lights had hardly been switched on before the big fellow put the sharp query to his companion:

"Watkins, is this room just as you left it when you went away with Mr. Gladwin?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Watkins, with characteristic deference of tone. "Bateato, the Jap, closed the house."

"H'm," said the other, laying his cane and hat on a table and drawing from the pocket of his light overcoat a blue print diagram of the house. Casting his eyes about the room, he unfolded the diagram and pointed to it, nodding his head behind him for Watkins to come and look.

"We're in this room now," he said, easily.

"Yes, sir."

"Out that way is the corridor to the kitchen."

He pointed to the panel-like door which a few minutes before had swallowed the very much undressed Officer 666.

"Yes, sir."

"And there's no other way out save through the front door or by way of this balcony behind those curtains?"

"No, sir."

"And," still running his finger over the diagram, "on the floor above are Gladwin's apartments."

"Yes, sir, at the head of the stairs--first door to the left."

"H'm, very good," slipping the diagram back into his pocket and lifting his eyes to the great portrait of the ancestral Gladwin.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly and with palpable relish, "that's a Stuart! Is that the great-grandfather, Watkins?"

"Yes, sir," responded Watkins, without any of his companion's enthusiasm.

"H'm," with the same grim emphasis, and off came the overcoat to be carelessly tossed across his hat and stick. His eye fell upon the great antique chest by the wall.

He lifted the lid to inspect its void interior. Glancing up above it, he motioned to Watkins and said:

"Here, help me get this out of the way."

Watkins glided to one end of the chest and together they hauled it clear of the wall. This done, he addressed Watkins as if he were but a creature to command:

"I can manage alone in here, but I want to be ready to leave by the time Miss Burton arrives. You go outside and wait in the car--and keep a sharp lookout."

Watkins bowed himself out with his stereotyped, "Yes, sir," and the door clicked gently after him.

The now lone invader returned to his interested survey of the paintings that covered the walls, turning easily on his heel until his line of vision embraced "The Blue Boy."

From his difficult peephole Travers Gladwin could see the sharp, stern features wrinkle with smiles before the intruder laughed lightly and breathed with seeming great enjoyment:

"Ha! The Blue Boy."

The smile went out as swiftly as it had come and was replaced by an utterly different expression as he swung about and visualized the Rembrandt on the wall above where the great empty chest had stood.

There was reverence and quick admiration in every feature as he bowed and exclaimed with a long sigh:

"Rembrandt! Rembrandt! God!--to paint like that!"

The emotions of this remarkable young man came and went with the quickness of his eye.

While still in the act of outpouring his admiration he whipped from the tail of his dress coat a flat fold of a dozen or more sheets of wrapping paper, shook them out and laid them on the lid of

the chest.

With another swift gesture he produced a knife, sprang the thin gleaming blade and walked up to the Rembrandt.

He raised the knife to the canvas with the ease of a practiced hand, when he heard a movement behind him, and turned his head.

Travers Gladwin had stepped from the sheltering screen of portières and stopped abruptly.

Whatever shock this sudden apparition of a uniformed policeman was to the man caught in the act of cutting a priceless canvas from its frame he managed to conceal by taking tight grip of every muscle in his body.

His eyes revealed nothing. There was no rush of color to or from his face. His first change of expression was to smile.

Dropping the arm that poised the knife, he let himself down easily from tiptoe and turned squarely to Gladwin.

"Good evening, Officer," he said without a tremor, showing his teeth in as engaging a smile as Travers Gladwin had ever looked upon.

"Evenin'!" said Gladwin, shortly, with an admirable affectation of Phelan's brogue.

"Do you find something on the balcony that interests you?" said the other slowly, still holding his smile and his amazingly confident bearing.

"You climbed up there to enjoy the moonlight, perhaps?" he added, even more softly, gaining reassurance from the wooden expression that Gladwin had forced upon his features.

"No, not the moonlight," responded the uniformed similitude of Officer 666, "the other light. I seen 'em go on. This house has been closed for months."

"Oh, yes, to be sure," the other shrugged. "You're most alert, Officer--right on the job, as they say. I congratulate you."

"I've been watching this house ever since Mr. Gladwin went away," said Gladwin slowly, unable to make up his mind whether to call Phelan or to continue the intensely interesting dialogue.

His visitor decided the situation for him by coolly lighting a cigar, taking a few deliberate puffs and turning it over in his fingers to inspect it as if it were the only object worth attention in the room.

Gladwin read this elaborate by-play for what it was worth--an effort to decide just how best to play his part--and was pleasantly thrilled with the realization that he himself was so well disguised in the uniform of Officer 666.

So he clung to his own rôle and forgot Michael Phelan.

"H'm," said the invader, reflectively. "That's very good of you, Officer. Let me offer you this as a slight token of my appreciation."

His left hand slid into his trousers pocket and brought up a roll of bills. His nonchalance was a perfect mask as he stripped off one of the bills and held it out carelessly to Gladwin.

On his part, Gladwin's expression was superbly blank as he reached for the bill, pocketed it and said with his purring brogue:

"Thank ye, sorr! And might I ask who ye are?"

"H'm, that's good," chuckled the other, now thoroughly master of himself and utterly confident.

"Now, who do you suppose, Officer, would come to the front door--unlock it--walk in and turn up the lights?--a thief?"

"They do sometimes," said Gladwin, cocking his head to one side with an air of owlish wisdom.

The other raised his eyebrows to express surprise.

"Do they really?" he drawled. "You amaze me, Officer. I've always supposed they broke in somehow and used dark lanterns."

"Not always," said Gladwin, obstinately.

The big man shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, puffed his cigar for a moment and said indulgently:

"Well, I'm sorry, Officer, to deprive you of the pleasure you would evidently derive in catching a thief and making an arrest. Now," with a light laugh, "who might you imagine I was?"

"Well, if I wasn't sure Mr. Gladwin was across the Atlantic I'd imagine that yez were Mr. Gladwin himself."

This was said with such laborious canniness that the thief made haste to discover just how the land lay.

"Oh, so you're sure Mr. Gladwin is abroad, eh?"

"Well, I see be the papers."

A real hearty laugh escaped this time, and he added brightly:

"Well, Mr. Policeman, I'll tell you something to help you make a good shrewd guess--*Mr.*

Gladwin is not abroad!"

"Then yez are Mr. Gladwin, sorr!" cried the young man eagerly, as if delighted at the discovery. The other leaned back against the table, crossed one foot over the other and said musingly:

"You found me out, Officer--I must admit it. Permit me to thank you again for looking out for my house, and if you don't mind I'll double this little reward."

Again the roll of bills came out and another \$20 gold certificate was gathered in by Officer 666, who grinned as he took it.

"Thank ye, sorr!"

The gesture with which this second benefaction was bestowed was a gesture of dismissal and the bestower set off on an easy saunter about the room, humming a tune.

Officer 666 did not move, and after a moment the other casually remarked:

"You don't seem to be in any hurry to get back to your post, officer."

"No, sorr--I ain't in no hurry."

"Have a cigar, then," and one was offered with the same assumption of good-natured indifference that had accompanied the tender of the bribes. Gladwin accepted the cigar, took off his cap, dropped it in and returned the cap to his head.

The thief was puzzled for a moment, until it occurred to him that it would suit his purpose best to have this thick-skulled copper in his company rather than have him go outside and discuss the matter with a more shrewd superior. Therefore he said quickly:

"Oh, officer, could you be spared off your rounds for, say, an hour?"

"Why, yes, sorr; I think so."

"Well, I want you to do me a favor. I'll pay you well for it."

"What is it?"

"You look to me like a chap who could keep a secret?"

"That's part o' me trade."

"Good! Well, then, I'm expecting a call from a lady."

"Oh, I see, sorr," and Gladwin forced another fatuous grin.

"No, you don't see," said the other, impressively. "This lady is my fiancée."

"Well, that's your business, sorr."

Gladwin was beginning to enjoy the battle hugely.

"You don't understand," explained the thief. "I'm about to be married."

"Oh, yez are about to be married!" with a slight wince.

"Yes, I'm going to be married to-night--secretly."

"Is that so? Well, I can't help yez about that, can I?"

"Oh, yes, you can, because I want it kept quiet on the lady's account."

"Well, I'll help you keep it quiet *on the lady's account!*" with an emphasis that got away from him, but was misinterpreted.

"Good!" and out came the roll of bills again and another yellow boy was slipped into the greedy palm of Officer 666.

"Thank you, sorr. But what can I do, sorr?"

"I'll show you later on. In the mean time help me take the covers off this furniture and make the place look habitable. Hurry now, for I haven't much time. That's the idea--brisk. Switch on the hall lights--you can find the button. Then go upstairs and straighten my room."

Gladwin stopped in his activities as if he had run against a wall.

"Your room, sorr?"

"Yes, at the head of the stairs, first door to the left. Then come back here and help me pack."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MISADVENTURES OF WHITNEY BARNES.

Just as it had not occurred to Travers Gladwin to ask Michael Phelan to define the limits of his beat along Fifth avenue so it happened that Whitney Barnes went forth in search of his friend without even the vaguest notion of where he might be found.

It is doubtful if young Mr. Barnes knew what a policeman's beat was. Certainly he did not conceive of it as a restricted territory.

He had gone about six blocks at his best stride, eagerly scanning both sides of the avenue before the thought came into his mind that he might be going in the wrong direction and that he might keep on indefinitely to the Staten Island ferry and obtain never a glimpse of the borrowed uniform of Officer 666.

"But I must warn the chap," he thought fiercely, "or there will be the very deuce and all to pay."

Whitney slowed down, came to a full stop and was meditatively chewing the head of his cane when an automobile halted at the curb. A head thrust itself out of a window of the limousine and a musical voice asked:

"Why, Mr. Barnes, what are you doing here?"

Whitney Barnes guiltily jumped and barely missed swallowing his cane.

Volplaning to earth, he looked for the source of this dismaying interruption. He recognized with a start one of the past season's debutantes whose mamma had spread a maze of traps and labyrinths for him--Miss Sybil Hawker-Sponge of New York, Newport, Tuxedo and Lenox.

Before he could even stutter a reply a motor footman had leaped down from the box and opened the door of the limousine. Miss Hawker-Sponge fluttered out, contrived her most winning smile and repeated:

"Why, Mr. Barnes, what are you doing here?"

Her big doll eyes rolled a double circuit of coquetry and slanted off with a suggestive glance at the massive doorway of the Hawker-Sponge mansion, one of the most aristocratically mortgaged dwellings in America.

"It is rather late for a call," she gushed suddenly, "but I know mamma"---

"Impossible!" cried Barnes. "That is--I beg your pardon--I should be charmed, but the fact is I was looking for a friend--I mean a policeman. Er--you haven't seen a good looking policeman going by, have you, Miss Sybil?"

All the coquetry in Miss Hawker-Sponge's eyes went into stony eclipse.

"You are looking for a policeman friend, Mr. Barnes?" she said icily, gathering up her skirts and beginning to back away. "I hope you find him."

She gave him her back with the abruptness of a slap in the face.

In another moment he was again a lone wayfarer in the bleak night wilderness of out-of-doors Fifth avenue.

Indubitably he had committed a hideous breach of good manners and could never expect forgiveness from Miss Hawker-Sponge. She had really invited him into her home and he had preferred to hunt for a "policeman friend." Yet the tragedy of it was so grotesquely funny that Whitney Barnes laughed, and in laughing dismissed Miss Hawker-Sponge from his mind.

He must find Travers Gladwin, and off he went at another burst of speed.

He covered about three blocks without pause.

A second and far more sensational interruption came from a side street, and again of the feminine gender.

It was a tall, weird looking figure wound in a black shawl and it bumped squarely into Whitney Barnes and brought him up sharply, spinning on one foot.

Before he stopped spinning he felt himself seized by the arm.

Without warning a bundle was thrust into his arms and he had to clutch it. In another instant the weird figure had fled up the avenue, turned a corner and vanished.

Instantly the bundle that Whitney Barnes held awkwardly and painfully, as if it were a firebrand, emitted an anguished wail.

If that wasn't a pretty pickle for Whitney Barnes! His cane had clattered to the pavement and he did not dare stoop to pick it up. The anguish from the bundle he held increased terrifically in volume. He could feel beads of perspiration running down his face.

What in desperation was he going to do with that awful bundle? He knew intuitively that the tall, shawled figure would never return.

"My God!" he cried, "I'll be arrested as the father of it, and what will Sadie say to that?"

It was no wonder that the son and heir of Old Grim Barnes sweated. It wasn't perspiration. One doesn't perspire in such awful straits--one sweats, like a navy.

It seemed ages before he could form the impulse to move in any direction for any definite purpose. He was on the point of making up his mind to lay the bundle on the doorstep when he sensed a heavy step from behind and was paralyzed by the gruff ejaculation:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Barnes twisted his head and beheld a big, deep-chested policeman--a haughty domineering policeman--who showed in every inch of him that the gods had anointed him above the mere ranks of mortal patrolmen.

"Take it! take it!" cried Barnes, extending the bundle toward the uniformed presence. "It's not mine," he almost shrieked. "A woman gave it to me--and I have a very important engagement and must hurry."

Sergeant McGinnis--for 'twas none other--drew back and waved the bundle from him.

"Just a minute, my young friend," he spoke through one side of his large mouth. "You'll hold that infant till its mother comes or you'll go with me to the police station and tell your story to the captain."

"But I can't wait," wailed Barnes. "I've got to find a policeman."

"A policeman, eh? Well, here's one for you, and a sergeant at that."

"I mean a friend. It's horribly important. I'll give you anything you ask if you'll only take this howling bundle."

"None o' that, young feller," McGinnis snapped him up. "You'll give me nothing and you'll come sharp and straight to the station. Now I know there's something back o' this."

"But I haven't time," Barnes objected. "It's most horribly important that I should find"---

"Chop it! Chop it! You'll come with me, and you'll lug that infant. If you won't come quiet I'll slip the nippers on you."

Barnes realized the hopelessness of the situation and looked about him wildly.

"Stop that taxicab, officer," he urged, as he saw one of the vehicles approaching. "I can't walk like this. I'll pay the fare--I'll pay everything."

McGinnis consented to this arrangement. The taxicab stopped. A few minutes later it bore the sergeant, his prisoner and the still howling infant to the threshold of the East Eighty-eighth street police station.

McGinnis consented to carry the infant as they got out and once inside the station lost no time in turning it over to the matron.

"Hello, McGinnis," said Lieut. Einstein from the desk; "what's all this?"

McGinnis explained in a few crisp sentences.

"Is the captain in, Lieutenant?" he asked. "This young fellow is after trying to bribe me."

Barnes protested that such a thought had never entered his head.

"I simply told him," he declared hotly, "that I had an important engagement"---

"Looking for a policeman, he says."

"For a friend. I may have said policeman--I may have said anything in such a beastly situation. I am sure that when the captain hears me he will understand immediately."

"That may be true, sir," said the lieutenant politely, "but the captain is out at present and won't be back till after midnight. If you want to, you can sit in the back room and wait for him."

Further protestations were unavailing. With a sigh of despair Barnes permitted himself to be led to the back room, where he dropped down on a chair and looked savagely about him.

The room was empty and there was nothing to gaze at save four blank walls and a black cat sitting in a corner idly washing its paws. Now and then a door opened, a face peered in and the door shut again. Somewhere a clock ticked dolefully.

An hour passed while the young man sought in vain to enchain his incoherent thoughts. He could think of nothing vividly. He could recall nothing at all.

Whenever the wail of that infant the matron was caring for reached him he writhed and ground his teeth.

In this sad plight he remained until a door near him opened and a man in plain clothes came stealthily in. He walked straight to Barnes, bent down and whispered:

"If you've got a hundred-dollar bill about you drop it onto the floor and walk out. The lieutenant won't see you."

The individual turned on his heel and went out the way he had come. He did not shut the door tightly behind him. Barnes felt that an eye was watching through the slit, so he lost no time in jumping to his feet, getting his money out of his wallet and dropping two one-hundred-dollar bills on the floor.

This done, he jammed the wallet back in his pocket, picked up his cane and gloves and opened the door through which he had entered the room. He started warily forward with his eyes straight ahead. He could feel that the lieutenant who sat behind the high-railed-off desk was the only person in the room and he could hear the scratch of his busy pen.

Gaining the street entrance, he drew an immense sigh of relief, opened it eagerly and fairly leaped outside to the steps. As the door shut behind him he thought he heard a sudden explosive laugh, but it meant nothing to him as he hurried along blindly, increasing his pace at every stride.

At the corner of Third avenue he stopped and consulted his watch. It was midnight!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN INSTANCE OF EPIC NERVE.

Travers Gladwin scaled the great staircase three steps at a time. Stumbling against a divan he threw himself across it and lay for a few moments stretched on his back with every muscle relaxed. He felt as if he had been buffeted by mighty tempests and overwhelmed by cataclysms. His head throbbed with fever and he felt a sickening emptiness inside.

How was he going to avert the catastrophe of an elopement and at the same time save himself and that charming young girl from a shrieking scandal? There didn't seem any coherent solution. If Whitney Barnes had only remained with him--at least to lend him moral courage!

Where had the confounded ass gone? Why didn't he return? A fine friend in need was he!

There was no time to unravel his perplexities and lay any definite plan. He must act, taking his cue as it was presented to him by the racing events of the moment.

He got up from the divan and rushed downstairs. He cleared the last landing, with a momentum that slid him across the polished floor of the hallway after the manner of small boys who slide on ice. He fairly coasted into the room, but his precipitate intrusion did not in the least disturb his visitor.

During Gladwin's brief absence that supernaturally composed individual had cut the Rembrandt from the frame and laid it on one of the sheets of wrapping paper he had spread out on the chest. He had also cut out a Manet, a Corot and a Vegas--all small canvases--and hung them over the back of a chair.

As the owner of these masterpieces skidded into the room the thief was taking down a Meissonier, frame and all, fondling it tenderly and feasting his eyes on the superb wealth of detail and the rich crimson and scarlet pigments in the tiny oblong within the heavy gilt mounting.

"Ah, Officer, you are back," he said easily, as Gladwin staggered against a table and gripped it for support. The methodical despoiler did not so much as turn his head as he placed the Meissonier on the chest and deftly cut out the canvas. His back was still squared to the flabbergasted young man as he continued:

"Come, get busy, Officer, if you are going to help me. Take down that picture over there on the right."

He pointed, and went on wrapping up the immensely valuable plunder.

Gladwin got up on a chair and reached for one of the least noteworthy of his collection.

"No, no--not that one," said the thief, sharply,--"the one above," an old Dutch painting that had cost a round \$10,000.

The young man took it down gingerly, biting his lips and cursing inwardly.

"That's it," he was rewarded, "bring it here."

Gladwin managed to cross the room with an appearance of stolid indifference and as he handed the picture to the "collector" he said haltingly:

"I take it these pictures is worth a lot of money, sorr."

"You're right, I take it," said the other with a laugh, beginning at once to slash out the canvas.

"Yes, sorr, I mean, *you take it!*" said Gladwin viciously. The wrathful emphasis missed its mark. The "collector" was humming to himself and working with masterful deftness.

"Now that woman's head to the left," he commanded as soon as he had disposed of the Dutch masterpiece. "And be quick about it. You move as if you were in a trance."

Gladwin saw that he was to take down his only Rubens, wherefore he deliberately reached for another painting, "The Blue Boy."

"No, not that thing!" exclaimed the "collector."

"Why, what's the matter with this one, sorr," snapped back Gladwin.

"It's a fake," said the other, contemptuously. "I paid two old frauds five hundred pounds for that thing in London a couple of years ago--it's absolutely worthless from the standpoint of art."

Gladwin looked at him in open-mouthed amazement and slid from the chair to the floor.

How had this astounding person come by the secret of "The Blue Boy?"

There was a positive awe in Gladwin's gaze as he sized up the big man--again from his shining patent leather shoes to his piercing eyes and broad, intellectual forehead. He fairly jumped when the command was repeated to take down the Rubens and hand it to him. As he handed it over he stammered:

"I don't think much of this one, sorr."

"You don't?" said the other, in pitying disgust. "Well, it's a Rubens--worth \$40,000 if it's worth a cent."

"Ye'z don't tell me," Gladwin managed to articulate.

Indicating the full length portrait of the ancestral Gladwin, he added, "Who is that old fellow over there, sorr?"

"Kindly don't refer to the subject of that portrait as fellow," the other caught him up. "That is my great-grandfather, painted by Gilbert Charles Stuart more than a century ago."

"You monumental liar," was on Gladwin's lips. He managed to stifle the outburst and ask:

"Are ye'z goin' to take all these pictures away with ye'z to-night?"

"Oh, no, not all of them," was the careless reply. "Only the best ones."

"How unspeakably kind of him!" thought the unregarded victim.

"If ye'z wanted the others," he said with fine sarcasm, "I could pack 'em up afther ye're gone an' sind thim to ye'z."

"That might be a good idea, Officer--I'll think it over," the pilferer thanked him.

Then he went on with his task of taking the back out of the mounting of the Rubens, showing that he did not trust his knife with such an ancient and priceless canvas.

Gladwin was thinking up another ironic opening when the door bell rang. He jumped and cried:

"If that's the lady, sorr, I'll go and let her in."

"No, you wait here," the other objected. "She might be frightened at the sight of a policeman--you stay here. I'll let her in myself," and he strode swiftly out into the hallway.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH THE HERO IS KEPT ON THE HOP.

Travers Gladwin watched the big handsome mis-presentiment of himself disappear into the hallway with every nerve at full strain.

As he heard the door open, then a delighted feminine cry and the unmistakable subtle sound of an embrace, he ground his finger nails into his palms and bit his lips. Every fibre of him burned with jealous hatred of this impostor.

If there had been only more of the brute left in the Gladwin strain undoubtedly there would have been a sensational clash between the two men for the benefit of the beautiful young girl who, Gladwin strove to acknowledge, was the helpless pawn of circumstances. But the refinements of blood rob the physical man of his savage resources and impose a serious hamper upon his primordial impulses.

Helen came into the room with the thief's arm about her waist while Gladwin stood dumbly at attention, his features hardened and inscrutable.

At sight of his uniform and failing to recognize him in his disguise the girl turned pale and uttered a frightened exclamation.

"Don't be alarmed, dear," the man at her side reassured her, smiling down upon her, "this is only officer--" He looked up with a laughing expression of inquiry.

"Murphy, sorr," responded Gladwin, through tightly compressed lips.

"Yes," the pretender nodded quickly. "Murphy, Officer Murphy, my dear--looks after my house when I'm away. He is one of the city's best little watchmen and he is going to see that everything is made safe and secure after we have gone."

Helen breathed an exclamation of relief, but the fright in her eyes lingered as the unconscious feeling struck in that the attitude of the policeman seemed more than a trifle strained.

She carried a little grip in one hand, which the bogus Gladwin took from her and handed to the real Gladwin, nodding significantly for him to leave the room. Turning to Helen, he said:

"But why did you bring the bag, dear? My man told me he found your trunk at the Grand Central Station."

"Yes," Helen answered, "but auntie insisted that I go to the opera, so I had to pack my travelling dress. I slipped out of the opera during the entre act, and went home to change my gown. I was so frightened and in such a dreadful state of nerves that I couldn't."

A shudder ran through her and she seemed on the point of breaking down when the man with whom she had chosen to elope drew her to him and said with what had every expression of genuine tenderness:

"There, there, dear! Calm yourself. Why, you're trembling like a leaf. There is nothing to be frightened about now."

She yielded to his embrace and he bent down his head to kiss her on the lips.

Whatever he projected in the nature of an enduring osculation was spoiled as Gladwin dropped the bag to the floor with a crash.

The man looked up angrily and the girl gave a frightened cry.

"What's the matter with you, officer?" the thief shot at him.

"Excuse me, sorr," said Gladwin, with mock humility, turning away his head to hide his emotions.

As the girl shrank from his arms the thief switched his attention from Officer 666 and led her to a chair, resuming his gentle tones. He pressed her to sit down, saying:

"I am just packing up some pictures. I shan't keep you waiting long. Now, that's good; you're getting calmer. You're all right now, aren't you?"

"Ye-es, Travers dear," she responded with an effort, looking into his face. "I shan't break down," she went on, with a nervous laugh. "I'm stronger than I look. I've made my mind up to it. The trouble is that my heart won't behave. It's beating terribly--just feel it."

He was about to place his hand on her heart when Gladwin was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. The thief straightened up and turned scowlingly upon the young man.

"Say, what's the matter with you, McCarthy?"

"Murphy, sorr," Gladwin retorted. "Me throat tickled me."

"Well," returned the other sharply, "if you would move around as I told you, your throat wouldn't tickle you. Get something to pack these paintings in. There isn't anything in this room--go upstairs and get a trunk."

"I don't know where there is none, sorr," Gladwin objected.

"Well, look around for one--a small empty trunk, and be quick about it." He spoke with crackling emphasis.

Stung to the quick by the overbearing insolence of this command, it required a prodigious effort for the young man to control his voice. He said with difficulty:

"I was thinking, sorr--suppose--the--trunk--is--full?"

The thief squared his broad shoulders and walked threateningly toward Gladwin. He stopped directly in front of the young man and said through his teeth, slowly and deliberately and without raising his voice:

"If the trunks are full--now listen carefully, because I want you to understand this--if the trunks are full, then empty one. Do you get my meaning? Take the fullness out of it, and after you have done that and there is nothing more left in it, then bring it down here. Now do you think you get my idea clearly?"

"Yes, sorr," said Gladwin, dully, feeling that there was no way out of the situation for the moment save to obey. Strive as he might he could not wholly shake off the influence of this splendid big animal's dominating will power.

And if it affected him that way he didn't wonder at the spell the man had cast upon the impressionable and sentimental Helen.

He left the room with a sudden spurt and swiftly mounted the stairs, the chief object of his haste being to prevent an extended interview in his absence and a resumption of tender dialogue.

He had scarcely gone when the spurious Gladwin turned again to the girl with his most engaging smile and softest tones:

"You see, dear," with a sweeping gesture that included his work of spoilation, "I am taking your advice--packing only the most valuable ones."

"I am afraid, Travers," said Helen, rising from her chair and coming toward him with all her impulsive love and confidence restored, "that I am giving you a lot of trouble."

"Trouble!" he cried, with the gushing effusiveness of a matinée idol. "You're bringing a great joy into my life."

He took her hand and caressed it, adding with the true lover's frown of perplexity, "But are you going to be happy, dear? That's what you must think of now--before it is too late."

It was a magnificent bluff and carried with deadly aim. The girl stopped him passionately:

"We must not stop to talk about that now--there isn't time. We must hurry, dear, and get away before auntie finds out and comes after me."

"Do you think she'll come here?" he asked slowly, while his forehead wrinkled.

"I am afraid Sadie will tell her!"

"Sadie--your cousin? H'm."

He made no effort to conceal that he was thinking rapidly.

"Perhaps you'd rather postpone it after all, Travers?" she said quickly, while the color rushed to

her cheeks and her lips trembled. "If you only thought it best I'd like to tell auntie what I'm going to do."

"No"; he retorted. "We can't do that--we've gone over all this before. It must be this way, or not at all. Which is it to be?"

"I've given you my word, you know," she said under her breath.

"That's my brave little girl!" he cried with a burst of feeling, reaching out his arm to embrace her.

Crash! Bang! Biff! Slam! Bam!

There burst into the room Officer 666, entangled in the lid and straps of an empty trunk. It was a steamer trunk and not very heavy, but Travers Gladwin was far from adept in baggage smashing.

He had wasted so much time in hunting for the trunk that he had sought to make up for the delay by executing what resembled an aeroplane descent.

At the final twist of the staircase the trunk had mastered him and charged with him into the room. As he lay sprawled on the floor with a foolish grin on his face, the discomfited lover turned on him with a voice of fury.

"Officer, what the deuce is the matter with you?"

The intense savagery of his tone made the girl shrink away from him and turn pale. He managed to cover his break so quickly with a forced laugh and an effort to assist Gladwin to his feet that her fear was only momentary.

In the last stage of his downward flight Gladwin glimpsed that he had dropped in barely in time to spoil another touching scene. With a grin of sheer delight, he asked:

"Where'll I put the trunk, sorr?"

"Put it there."

The self-styled Gladwin pointed to the right of the chest and set to work to gather up his few hundred thousand dollars' worth of pelf. He was about to place the flat packages in the trunk when he turned to Helen and asked:

"Do you see any others that you'd like me to take, dear?"

"Oh, you know best," she replied. "Only I should think that you would take some of the miniatures."

"The miniatures?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes," said the girl. "They are the loveliest I've ever seen and they'll hardly take up any room at all. If we are going to be away such a long time I think it would be safer to take them."

It was palpable to Travers Gladwin that the big chap had received a psychic jolt, for his hand trembled a little as he laid down the canvases on the top of the chest and addressed the girl:

"I didn't know you'd seen the miniatures."

"Oh, yes, when I was here this afternoon."

He took this between the eyes without flinching. His voice was marvellously steady as he said:

"I didn't know you were here this afternoon."

"You didn't?" she asked in a puzzled tone. "How funny! You'd just gone out when I called, but two of your friends were here and one of them showed me the miniatures, and china, and plate and lots of things. Why, I left a message for you about the opera--didn't they tell you?"

The girl stood with her back to Gladwin and the man she addressed slowly turned his head and glanced over her head with a keen, flashing look of inquiry. Gladwin lifted his chin a little and met the look without change of expression.

"Didn't they tell you, Travers?" the girl repeated.

"Yes, yes; they told me," he said hastily, still maintaining his fixed gaze upon Gladwin. There was barely an instant's pause before he spoke:

"Officer, kindly go up to my room and see if you can find a bag and pack enough things to last a week or two."

"Yes, sorr." Gladwin flung out of the room.

He started noisily up the stairs until he saw that the thief had turned his back to him, whereat he vaulted the banister and dropped lightly upon a divan in a recessed niche that could not be seen from the room he left.

The moment Gladwin vanished the thief turned to Helen and asked sharply:

"What time did you see my friends here?"

"A little after five," replied the girl, recoiling slightly with a look of dismay, for there was a new raw edge to the sharpness of his tone.

"Did you tell them about the elopement?" he said less harshly, but with a scarcely veiled eagerness.

"Why, they knew all about it," Helen hastened to reply, searching his face apprehensively.

"Knew about it?" he mused, fairly grinding his brows together under the pressure of his agitated thoughts.

"What did you tell them?" he queried steadily, measuring her fresh, young beauty and vowing to himself that whatever struggle impended he was going through with it to the limit of his resources.

"That we were to meet here," she answered with increasing fear.

"That we were to meet *here*?" he repeated.

"Yes, at half-past ten--oh, was it something I shouldn't have told them?" she cried, coming toward him.

Once more Officer 666 snapped the tension. He had wriggled around the staircase and found the suitcase Bateato had packed and left for him. Hating to play the rôle of an eavesdropper any longer than necessary he made a flying start and burst into the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

GLADWIN COMES OUT OF HIS SHELL.

"What the"---

The spurious aristocrat and art collector suppressed his torrid exclamation. The impulse moved him to seize the uniformed butter-in and pitch him through the nearest window. He was big and powerful enough to do it, too.

In the furious glance he got, Travers Gladwin read a warning that in an earlier stage of his career would have made him feel mighty uncomfortable. Now he liked the smell of danger and met the message of wrath without a flicker.

"What's that you've got there?" the thief, having mastered himself, asked, pointing to the grip.

"'Tis the bag you asked for, sorr," drawled Gladwin.

"I told you to pack it," said the other, sharply.

"All packed, sorr. Hunting clothes, shirts, ties, socks"---

He looked up with a boyish grin and the big chap was stumped for a moment. The thief said slowly:

"Now take it up to my room and unpack it." It was his turn to grin.

"What, sorr?" asked the dismayed Gladwin.

"I shan't want these things after all," came the velvety rejoinder. "Unpack it carefully and bring it back here. And kindly be more careful of the stairs when you come down--one step at a time, *please!* Now, what are you waiting for?"

Gladwin withdrew reluctantly, stealing a glance at Helen as he sidled through the curtained doorway. Her eyes never left the face of the man she thought she loved, but whose character was being swiftly revealed to her in a new light.

That resourceful individual waited only for the blue uniform to pass through the portières, when he sprang forward and reached out on both sides for the heavy mahogany folding doors. He brought them together swiftly and softly, then ripped down the portières from the pole, flinging one to the left of the door and the other across the chest.

"Now listen, Helen," he cried, seizing her roughly by the shoulder. "It may be that we will have to get out of here in a hurry."

"W-w-w-hy, what's the matter?" she stammered, wincing at the crushing grip of his hand.

He replied with a swift rush of words that fairly stunned her:

"Your aunt may find it out and try to stop us. Now I shall be on the lookout, but I want you to do everything I tell you--I'll see if the coast is clear in case we have to go out the back way. In the meantime I want you to wrap these pictures for me. I wouldn't ask you, dear, only we haven't a minute to wait."

He darted across the room and opened the narrow door that led into the backstairs corridor. Helen stared stupidly after him until he disappeared and then turned toward the chest and went to work wrapping up the precious canvases like one in a trance. She had scarcely started when the folding doors opened noiselessly and Bateato stuck in his head.

Fearing that some harm had come to his master the little Jap had left the Ritz and sprinted all the way to the Gladwin mansion. He was breathless and wild-eyed, yet he had entered the house as silently as a breath of air.

Peeking into the room Bateato noted the ripped-down portières and devastated picture frames. His Oriental mind told him but one thing--robbery. Seized with a violent spasm of loyalty to his master he brushed into the room and exclaimed:

"Whatz thees? Oh, hell--damn!"

Helen was in too good training by this time to swoon, though she wanted to. She started back in alarm and exclaimed:

"Oh, how you startled me!"

Bateato circled round her like an enraged rat.

"You no fool me--I know you tief--you steal picture--I get pleece--much pleece--whole big lot pleece, quick."

He headed for the door.

Helen pursued him, crying: "See here! Wait a minute! You don't understand! Mr. Gladwin!"

The Jap was gone and the hall door slammed after him before she had reached the folding doors. In another instant Travers Gladwin, who had been making a vain hunt for a revolver in the upper part of the house came flying down the stairs and assailed the frightened girl with another overwhelming shock.

Seeing she was alone he threw himself into the breach headlong:

"Miss Helen, just a moment. I've been waiting for a chance to speak to you. You must get away from here at once. Do you understand--at once! Don't waste time talking--go quick while you have a chance. You mustn't be mixed up in what's coming."

The girl felt that her heart would burst with its palpitations of fear, but she was incapable of flight. Her limbs seemed like leaden weights. Some force working without the zone of her mental control made her stammer:

"W-w-ho are you?"

"Listen," the young man raced on, "and you must believe what I say--this man you came here to meet and elope with is not Travers Gladwin at all."

She expressed her horrified disbelief in a frozen stare.

"It's true," he pursued passionately. "He's an imposter! The real Travers Gladwin you met here this afternoon. He was I; that is, I was he. I mean I am Travers Gladwin--only I've got this uniform on now. It is only on your account that I have not caused his arrest and a sensation. I can't have you mixed up in a nasty scandal. I want to save you--don't you see I do?--but I can't wait much longer."

"I don't believe what you are saying! I can't believe it! Oh, it's too horrible!" sobbed Helen, clinging to a fragment of her shattered idol as a drowning man clings to a straw.

Gladwin was on the point of resuming his appeal when he sensed a heavy tread. He had divined that the picture thief had left the room to reconnoitre emergency exits or to learn whether or not the house was surrounded. He had hoped that he might run into Michael Phelan, but did not stop to puzzle out why this had not happened. Backing to the door, he whispered:

"He's coming--question him. That's all I ask. I'll be waiting to see that you get out in safety--trust me!"

He wriggled backward and disappeared through the folding doors.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A VISIT TO THE EXILED PHELAN.

But where, oh, where was the exiled Phelan when the bogus Gladwin went on his backstairs investigation? Puzzled as he was by the fast moving events of the night, stripped of the uniform of his authority, still his police instincts should have warned him of this new character in his dream.

Michael Phelan, however, was busy--busy in a way one little would suppose.

As the gentlemanly outlaw entered the kitchen, Phelan was standing on the tubs of the adjoining laundry, his face almost glued to the window-pane and his eyes uplifted to the fourth story rear window of a house diagonally opposite, through which he could observe a pantomime that thrilled him.

It was late, well past bedtime even for the aristocratic precincts of New York. Yet there was going on behind that brilliantly lighted window a one-man drama strangely and grotesquely wide-awake.

A first casual glance had conveyed the impression to Phelan that a tragedy was being enacted before his eyes--that murder was being done with fiendish brutality, and he--Phelan--powerless to intervene.

The seeming murderer was a man of amazing obesity, a red-faced man with a bull neck and enormous shoulders, clad in pink striped pajamas and a tasselled nightcap of flaming red.

Back and forth the rotund giant swayed with something in his arms, something which he crushed in his fists and brutally shook, something which he held off at arm's length and hammered with ruthless blows.

"The murtherin' baste!" ejaculated Phelan as he switched off the one light he had been reading by and darted into the next room to get a better view from the summit of the kitchen tubs.

Suddenly the mountain of flesh and the debile victim that he was ruthlessly manhandling disappeared from view. For several long thundering seconds the petrified Phelan could see nothing save a dancing crimson tassel, the tassel attached to the nightcap. Surely a mighty struggle was going on on the floor!

Phelan did not hear the light step upon the kitchen stair or the stealthy tread of the big man in evening dress as he pussy-footed his way to the kitchen door leading out into the back yard and found that it was easily opened.

Every sentient nerve in Michael Phelan's being was concentrated in his eyes at that moment and it is highly doubtful if he would have heard a fife and drum corps in full blare enter the kitchen. He heard nothing and saw nothing below that upward focal angle.

The man Phelan should have heard flashed the light in his cane only at infrequent intervals. He did not aim its bright revealing beam into the half open door of the adjoining laundry and he was as unconscious of the proximity of Phelan as that unfrocked or de-uniformed officer was of the invader. He returned to Miss Helen Burton in complete ignorance of the fact that the lower regions of the dwelling were otherwise than empty.

But the second he re-entered the room he saw the girl was strangely agitated and that she feared to look at him. Laying down his cane he crossed the room to her side and said in his softest tones:

"Well, you haven't got on very fast in your packing, have you, dear?"

Helen was leaning against the back of a chair, feeling she was surely going to topple over in a swoon. Summoning all her reserve of nerve power, she strove to reply naturally:

"No. I--I didn't quite understand how to pack."

He was at her side now and seized both her hands.

"Why, Helen, what's the matter? Your hands are cold as ice."

He spoke warmly and tenderly, while at the same time his eyes were everywhere about the room and he was listening with the wary alertness of a rodent.

There was more than a little of the rat in the soul inclosed in this splendid envelope.

"It's nothing--only I'm faint," she said tremulously.

"That policeman has been talking to you--hasn't he?" he said quietly.

"Yes, he has," she blurted, with a catch in her throat.

"Did he tell you who he was?"

He measured out each word and conveyed the sense. "Did he tell you who he pretended to be?"

"Yes," the girl responded, scarcely above a whisper.

He took her by the shoulders and turned her squarely toward him, looking down into her face with frowning eyes.

"Now, Helen, I want you to tell me the truth--the truth, you understand? I shall know it even if you don't. Who did he say he was?"

A feeling of repugnance took possession of the girl and she shook herself free and stood back. Her body had warmed into life again and she looked steadily into his eyes as she answered:

"Travers Gladwin!"

He needed all his great bulk of flesh and steel-fibred nerve to fend off this shock. Not the remotest fancy had crossed his mind that Travers Gladwin might be in New York. It was with a palpably forced laugh that he ejaculated:

"Travers Gladwin! Oh, he did, eh?"

The girl had read more than he imagined the sudden contraction of his features and dilation of his eyes had revealed.

"I want you to tell me the truth--you must!" she said passionately. "*Who are you?*"

"A man who loves you," he let go impulsively. The desire to possess her had sprung uppermost in his mind again.

"But are you the man you pretended to be--are you Travers Gladwin?" she insisted, compelled against her convictions to grope for a forlorn hope.

"And if I were not?" he cried, with all the dramatic intensity he could bring to voice. "If instead of being the son of a millionaire, a pampered molly-coddle who never earned a dollar in his life--suppose I were a man who had to fight every inch of the way"---

He stopped. His alert ear had caught a sound in the hallway. He sped noiselessly to the folding door and forced one back, revealing Officer Murphy.

"Come in," he said threateningly, and Gladwin came in a little way.

"Where's that bag?" said the thief, with a glare and a suggestive movement with his hands.

"What bag, sorr?" said Gladwin, feeling that for the moment discretion was the better part of valor.

"The one you brought in here."

"You told me to unpack it, sorr. It's upstairs, sorr."

"Go and get it. Go now--and don't waste time."

Gladwin went, determined this time that he must arm himself with some weapon, even if it were one of the rusted old bowie knives of his grandfather that ornamented the wall of his den. He estimated accurately that he would prove a poor weak reed in the hands of that Hercules in evening dress, and while the thought of a knife sickened him, he was impelled to seek one.

As he mounted the stairs the thief strode to the table near the window and gathered up Helen's opera cloak and handed it to her.

"Now, go quickly," he urged; "my car is just across the street. There is no time to argue your absurd suspicions."

"No, I shan't go," retorted Helen, accepting the cloak and backing away.

"So you believe that man?" he asked reproachfully.

"I am afraid I do," she said firmly.

"Then I'll show you mighty quick you're wrong," he cried, as a crowning bluff. "He's probably some spy sent by your aunt. I'll get my man in here and will have him arrested after you and I have gone. Wait here--I shan't be a moment."

As the door slammed after him Helen ran to the window and then back to the door. She was now terribly alarmed on another score. She feared to go out and she feared to remain in the house. She feared physically--feared violence.

Travers Gladwin had found the bowie knife and slipped it into his trousers pocket. Then he had gone down the stairs on the run. As he entered the room and saw that the man had gone he said:

"Is he running away--and without his pictures or his hat and coat. What's his game, I wonder."

"He's coming back--he says my aunt sent you here," said Helen, but less afraid at his return to the room.

"Never mind what he says," Gladwin returned, gesturing excitedly. "You must go home--now. To-morrow you can learn the truth."

"But if I go out he'll be sure to see me," she protested.

Gladwin looked about him and thought a moment.

"Do you see that little alcove back of the stairs," he said quickly, pointing. Helen crossed the room and nodded.

"Well, hide in there," he commanded. "The curtains will conceal you. If he and his man come back I'll get them in this room--then I'll press this button, see?"

He indicated a button and added: "That rings a buzzer; you can hear it from the alcove, and then slip out the front door."

The girl paused but an instant, then fled to the place of shelter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH BLUFF IS TRUMPS.

Having disposed of the girl for the moment, Travers Gladwin decided it was time to call Michael Phelan to his assistance. There was no telling what this amazing crook might do now. He was too much for him. That a thief and impostor could possess such superhuman nerve had never occurred to his untutored mind. He was a perfect dub to have let the situation reach such a stage of complexity, though the one thought uppermost in his mind was to save Helen from public ridicule and contempt.

He had reasoned it out that just the uniform of Officer 666 would serve him almost as a magician's wand. He had almost counted on the thief taking one craven look at his constabulary disguise and then leaping through the window--fleeing like a wolf in the night--he, Travers Gladwin, remaining a veritable hero of romance to sooth and console Helen and gently break the news to her that she had been the dupe of an unscrupulous criminal. Instead of which--he ground his teeth, went to the little panel door and shouted Phelan's name.

Mrs. Phelan's son came a-running.

He had been on his way. The vast girthed individual in the pink striped pajamas and tasselled nightcap had accomplished his awful purpose, but the climax had been anti-climax and Phelan had ground his teeth in rage.

He had been on the point of bursting through the window and somehow scrambling aloft to the rescue of that helpless being who was being ground and wrenched and pounded by that porcine monster, when the monster suddenly rose to view again with a dumb-bell in each hand.

The jaw of Officer 666 slowly dropped as he watched the manipulation of the dumb-bells. There was no passion in the stodgy movements of the great paddy arms. Even so far away as he was Phelan could see that the man puffed and blew and that his vigor was slowly waning. Then suddenly the huge man stooped and held up in plain view a dangling wrestling dummy.

The lone watcher swallowed a savage oath.

"Sure 'twas exercisin' an' not murther he was doin'," Phelan hissed through his teeth.

His anger was white hot. Again he had been the victim of delusion and had wasted heroic emotions on a stuffed dummy that served merely as an inanimate instrument in a course of anti-fat calisthenics.

Every nerve in Phelan's body was fairly a-bristle as he made his way upstairs and burst into the great drawing-room and picture gallery.

"Fer the love o' hivin," he cried, "give me me uniform and let me out o' here."

"Here's your uniform; I've had enough of it," replied Gladwin, throwing him the coat and cap, "and get into it quick. There's work for you right in this house."

"There is not, nor play neither," snapped Phelan. "I've got to go out and chase up a drunk or throw a faint or git run over or somethin' desperate to square mesilf with the captain. I'm an hour overdue at the station."

"You'll square yourself with the captain all right if you just do what I tell you," said Gladwin eagerly, helping him on with his coat and pushing him toward the window recess. "You go right in there behind those curtains and wait till I call you."

Phelan took one look at the young man's face and muttered as he obeyed. "This must be a hell of a joke."

And just then the thief breezed in again, jerking back on his heels as he caught sight of Gladwin *sans* uniform, *sans* moustache and *sans* eyebrows. But a glance at that young man meant volumes and there was no limit to his spontaneous resources. He summoned a laugh and jerked out:

"Oh, so you've resigned from the force?"

"Yes," retorted Gladwin, "and let me tell you that this little excursion of yours has gone far enough. I'll give you one chance--get away from here as quickly as you can."

The big fellow curled one corner of his lip in a contemptuous smile, then glanced about him quickly and asked:

"Where's the young lady?"

"Never mind the young lady," Gladwin flung back at him. "It was only on her account that I let you go as far as this. Now get out and keep away from that young lady--and drop my name."

The sneering smile returned and balancing himself easily as he looked down on Gladwin, he said:

"Easy, son--easy. I don't like to have little boys talk to me like that," and turning to the doorway behind him he beckoned. The obedient Watkins sidled in and stopped with head averted from Gladwin, who started with surprise at seeing him.

Stepping forward and making sure there could be no mistake, Gladwin turned to the thief and exclaimed:

"Oh, now I understand how you knew all about my house. This is what I get for not sending this man to jail where he belonged."

"Don't bother with him, Watkins," snarled the big fellow, as he noted his companion's complexion run through three shades of yellow.

"There's no time to bother with him," he went on, and reaching out he caught Travers Gladwin by the shoulder and whirled him half way across the room.

The young man spun half a dozen times as he reeled across the carpet and he had to use both hands to stop himself against a big onyx table. As he pulled himself up standing he saw that Watkins had lifted the trunk on his shoulders and was headed for the hallway.

"Phelan!" he gasped out. "Here, quick!"

Officer 666 came out with the snort and rush of a bull.

"Stop that man," cried the thief, pointing to Watkins, "he's trying to get out of here with a trunkful of pictures."

The man's hair-trigger mind had thought this out before Phelan was half way round the table. One lightning glance at the thickness of the patrolman's neck and the general contour of his rubicund countenance had translated to him the sort of man he had to deal with.

"Here--here--put down that trunk," spluttered Phelan, brandishing his club at Watkins. Watkins dropped the trunk and at a signal from his companion was gone. Swiftly and silently as he vanished, he could not have been half way to the door before the thief urged Phelan:

"Quick--go after that man--he's a thief!"

"Stop Phelan!" cried Gladwin, who had begun to see through the pantomime. "They're both thieves!"

Phelan tried to run four ways at once.

"W-w-what?" he gurgled.

"It's a trick to get you out of the house," said Gladwin with his eyes on the big man, who was calmly smiling and who had fully made up his mind on a magnificent game of bluff.

"What the blazes kind of a joke is this?" blurted Phelan, looking from one to the other in utter bewilderment.

"You'll find it's no joke, officer," said the bogus Gladwin sharply--"not if he gets away."

"You'll find it's not so funny yourself," cut in the real Gladwin. Then to Phelan, "Arrest this man, Phelan."

"Do you mean it?" asked the astonished Phelan, sizing up the thief as the highest example of aristocratic elegance he had ever seen in the flesh.

"Of course I mean it," Gladwin shot back. "Look out for him--there he goes for the window."

The thief had started in that direction, but his purpose was not escape. The idea had flashed upon him that Helen might be concealed there. Phelan headed him off, whereupon the thief said severely, in a tone that was far more convincing than Gladwin's most passionate sincerity:

"Now be careful, officer, or you'll get yourself into a lot of trouble."

"Don't let him bluff you, Phelan," cautioned Gladwin.

"You bet your life I won't," Phelan answered, though he was already bluffed. "I'll stick close to yez," he faltered, inching uncertainly toward the thief.

He had come close enough for that astute individual to make out that he wore the same uniform young Gladwin had been masquerading in and he made capital of this on the instant.

"How do you think it is going to look," he said, impressively, "if I prove that you've tried to help a band of thieves rob this house?"

"A band of thieves?" Phelan's jaw dropped wide open.

"He's lying to you," cried Gladwin.

"I said a band of thieves," insisted the thief. "Why he's got his pals hidden all over the house."

"I tell you he's lying to you," Gladwin cut in frantically, seeing that Phelan was falling under the spell of the big man's superb bluff, and at the same time remembering Helen and pressing the button in the wall to warn her that the time had come for her to flee.

"We're the only ones in this house," Gladwin pursued, as Phelan gave him the benefit of his pop-eyes before he yielded them again to the stronger will.

"Then they've all escaped," said the thief, easily, thrusting his hands in his pockets to help out his appearance of imperturbability.

"You let one go out, Phelan, and there were two others beside this one."

The buttons on Phelan's coat were fairly undulating with the emotions that stirred within him. In his seething gray matter there stirred the remembrance that Bateato had told him that women were robbing the house.

"You mean the women," he said, ignoring Gladwin and addressing the thief. "I remember--when the little Japanaze called me oft me beat, he said there was women crooks here, too."

"He's lying to you, Phelan," persisted Gladwin, though with less vehemence, a great feeling of relief having visited him in the belief that Helen had made her escape. "You can have the whole place searched just as soon as you've got this man where he can't get away. There are no women here."

This last declaration had scarcely passed his lips when a woman's voice raised in hysterical protest was audible in the hallway.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BATEATO SUMMONS BIG MUCH POLICE.

A vitagraph film of Bateato's journey to and from the police station would consist of a series of dark brown blurs. If you have ever noticed a mouse in full flight you will have some idea of how that Jap ran. He knew where the police station was, too, for he had been there once when his brother, Itchi Comia, was arrested for assaulting a Russian peddler.

If the little Jap had only coursed through another street things might have gone somewhat differently in the Gladwin household, for he would have encountered Whitney Barnes hurrying in the opposite direction, and that young man would very likely have prevented him from going to the station.

But there was absolutely no obstacle in Bateato's way until he reached the station house, and the only obstacle he encountered there was a serious impediment in his speech.

Police Captain Stone had returned to barracks a few minutes after the departure of Barnes and a few minutes before the arrival of Bateato. He was standing beside the lieutenant's chair when the Jap sped in, and he seemed almost interested (for a police captain) at the extraordinary manifestations of emotion in Bateato's countenance.

"All pleece--quick--robbers--thieves--ladies!" began Bateato, then paused and made wild jabs above his head with his hands.

"Crazy as a nut," said the lieutenant in an undertone to the captain, and the captain nodded.

"All pictures--thieves--steal ladies!" was Bateato's second instalment, and the captain and lieutenant looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Big much pleece!" shrieked Bateato, made some more motions with his hands and rushed out into the street.

"It's Jap whiskey," said the captain, musingly, utterly unimpressed. "He isn't crazy. That Jap whiskey's awful stuff. They licked the Russian army on it. He'll run it off. If you ever see a Jap runnin' you'll know what's the matter."

Bateato ran a block and then stopped.

"Hell damn!" he exploded. "I no tell where house."

He ran back to the station and burst in again with even more precipitation.

"I no tell house," he rattled off. "Mr. Gladwin--Travers Gladwin. Big lot white house--Fifth avenue--eighty, eighty, eighty. Quick--thieves--ladies!" and he was gone again before Captain Stone could remove his cigar from his face.

The captain looked at the lieutenant and the lieutenant looked at the captain.

"Maybe he ain't drunk, Captain," ventured the lieutenant. "There's that Gladwin house on the books. It's marked closed and there's a note about a million-dollar collection of paintings."

The captain thought a moment and then burst into action:

"Call the reserves and get the patrol wagon," he shouted. "I remember that Jap. I guess there's something doing. I'll go myself."

As the reserves were all asleep and the horses had to be hitched to the patrol wagon Bateato had a big start of his big much pleece.

Notwithstanding the breathless condition in which he had arrived at the station house, his return journey was accomplished at his dizziest speed. Also he arrived back at the house way in advance of Whitney Barnes. There was a reason.

Wearing a frock coat and a silk hat and carrying a cane (of course he called it *stick*) one is hardly equipped for marathoning. And if you must know more, Whitney's small clothes were too fashionably tight to permit of more than a swift heel and toe action. At this he was doing admirably in his passionate haste to return and warn his friend Gladwin when another woman came into his life and appealed for succor.

Three in one evening, when he was perfectly satisfied to stop at one--the bewitching Sadie.

No. 3 was of an entirely different type from No. 1 and No. 2, and, happily for Whitney, there was no yowling bundle this time--merely a cat, and a silent cat at that.

She was a plump little woman and rather comely and she was intensely excited, for the cat in the case was hers and the cat was up the only tree on that street east of Central Park. At the foot of the tree sat a large bulldog gazing fixedly up at the cat.

Whitney Barnes was so occupied with his heel and toe pace that he did not descry the woman or the dog or the tree or the cat until the woman seized him by the arm and cried:

"You must save my darling Zaza from that dog."

Then she tailed off into hysterical sobs, but did not release her grip.

"Madam, I'm in great haste," retorted Barnes, striving to wriggle free from her grip. "I would advise you to call a policeman."

"There is no policeman," sobbed the distressed mistress of Zaza. "Oh, you m-m-m-must s-s-s-save my Z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-aza. Oo-oo!"

Then Barnes glimpsed the dog and its fang-filled grin as it stared up at the cat.

"You don't expect me to tackle that dog?" he asked, backing away and making another effort to free himself.

"Shoot him! do anything to him!" insisted the distressed female. "Oo-oo-oo! he kills cats. Do something quick or I must scream."

Whitney Barnes would have welcomed an open manhole to vanish into. If that woman screamed and held fast to him till the police came it would be just as bad as the baby case. But if he tackled the dog he would probably go to the hospital and be afflicted with hydrophobia and all sorts of things.

"Calm yourself my dear woman," he said frantically. "The dog cannot climb the tree and your cat is perfectly safe."

"Are y-y-y-you s-s-s-sure?" she moaned. Then grabbing him tighter. "But you must not leave me. In case the dog should go up that tree you must attack it with your cane."

"I promise," panted Barnes, "if you will only release your grip on my arm. Your finger nails are tearing the flesh."

"I w-w-w-will not hold you so tight," she consented, "but I must hold on to you till somebody comes. Oh, look at that brute. He is biting the tree. He---"

But the sudden clangor of a patrol wagon and the hammering of steel-shod hoofs on the cobbles caused the owner of Zaza both to cease her shrill lamentations and let go of Whitney Barnes's arm.

The patrol wagon was rolling down behind them at a furious pace while its gong rent the stillness of the night as a warning to all crooks and criminals to beware and to scurry to shelter. It is the New York brass band method of thief hunting and if that patrol wagon gong hadn't broken before the vehicle had crossed Madison avenue the destinies of several prominent personages might have been seriously hampered in their headlong fling.

That gong kept blaring its clang of warning long enough to frighten off the dog and restore Whitney Barnes to freedom, and once released from the bruising grip of that distraught little woman he turned his back upon Zaza's fate and ran--he ran so long as he considered it feasible to maintain the integrity of his trousers. That is, he ran not quite a block, then dropped back to his heel and toe exercise and swiftly ate up the distance that separated him from Travers Gladwin's home.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PHELAN LOSES HIS BRIBE.

It was merely a coincidence that Bateato should drag Helen back into the room just as Gladwin had gone on record with the declaration, "There are no women here," but it was a sufficiently dramatic coincidence to jar from Officer No. 666 the exclamation:

"Where the divil are they all springin' from?"

Bateato had come up with Helen as she was descending the stoop, had seized her by the wrist and almost swung her off her feet as he swept her back into the house and rounded her up before the three men, dumb with fright and barely able to stand. Still gripping her wrist, Bateato let go the Maxim volley:

"You tief! She try get away, but Bateato catch fast--she tief--I see steal all pictures--she"---

"Bateato, you idiot!" his master hurled at him with a menacing gesture that caused the little Jap to drop the girl's hand and jump back.

"Didn't I tell you to stay at the hotel?" continued Gladwin, fiercely, for the moment ignoring both Phelan and the thief.

"Yes, but I 'fraid--much late you no come. Bateato come back see girl steal all pictures!"

The little Jap had fallen into Phelan's state of blind bewilderment.

"Shut up!" his master snapped him up, walking up to him with an eat-'em-alive expression. "And now listen--I don't want you to say anything more, understand? Not a word to anybody about anything. Not a syllable!"

"I no spick," bleated the Jap.

"See that you don't--not a single word--if you do I'll skin you!"

Never in the three years he had served the young man had Bateato seen him in anything like this savage state of mind.

"I spick no more for noting not nobody quick!" he promised, and his hand clasped over his mouth like a vise.

Having corked Bateato in this wise, Gladwin turned to Helen, who stood as if rooted to the floor, staring straight ahead of her.

"Don't be frightened," he said gently. "Everything is all right." He took her arm to reassure her and then spoke to Phelan, who had been making a vain effort to solve the mix-up and didn't feel quite sure that he wasn't bewitched.

"Now, Phelan," said Gladwin, "I'll explain the thing."

"I wish to God ye would!" said Phelan from the bottom of his heart.

"This lady's being here is all right--and she isn't connected with this affair in any way. I'll prove that to you readily enough."

"Well, go ahead." And Phelan crossed his eyes in an effort to include in the focus both Gladwin and the thief de luxe, whose splendidly groomed appearance impressed him the more.

On his part the thief was leaning carelessly against a cabinet looking on with the expression of one both amused and bored. What he had noticed most was that Helen kept her eyes averted from him as if she feared to look at him and that she had palpably transferred her allegiance to Gladwin. When she had recovered some of her self-control she followed that young man's words eagerly and obeyed his slightest signal.

"I will explain to you, Phelan, as soon as I see this young lady started for home," Gladwin ran on, and proceeded with Helen toward the entrance to the hallway.

"Hold on! Yez'll not leave this room," Phelan stopped them, his suspicions again in a state of conflagration.

"But I only want---"

"I don't care what yez want," Phelan snorted, blocking the way. "Yez'll stay here."

"Oh, well--just as you say," returned the young man desperately, "but I will have to ask my man to escort this lady out and put her in a taxicab. Bateato"---

"Bad Pertaters 'll stay where he is."

Phelan was visibly swelling with the majesty of the law.

"You're very disagreeable," Gladwin charged him; then to Helen, "I'm awfully sorry I cannot go with you, but I think you can find the way yourself. Just go out through the hall, and"---

"She'll stay right here with the rest o' yez," was Phelan's ultimatum, as he squared himself in the doorway with the heroic bearing of a bridge-defending Horatius.

The only member of that tense little tableau who really had anything to fear from the spectre of the law embodied in the person of Officer 666 had waited for Gladwin to play his poor hand and, conceiving that this was the psychological moment, sauntered across the room and said with easy assurance:

"Officer, if there's anything further you want of me, you'll have to be quick."

"Yez'll wait here, too, till I can communicate with headquarters," Phelan gave him back, not liking the tone of command.

"Then hurry up, because it won't go well with you if I am detained."

"Now, don't yez threaten me!" exploded Phelan. "I'm doin' me duty by the book."

"Threaten you! Why, I can show you that you have been helping to rob my house."

This was a new current of thought--a sudden inspiration--but this peer of bluffers managed to crowd a volume of accusation in the slow emphasis with which he said it.

"Your house!" gasped Phelan, rocked clear off the firm base he had scarcely planted himself on. "What do ye mean--who are yez?"

"Who do you suppose I am? Travers Gladwin, of course."

Even the fear-numbed Helen Burton was startled into animation by this amazingly nervy declaration and half rose from the chair she had been guided to and forced into by Gladwin when she seemed on the verge of swooning at Phelan's refusal to permit her to depart.

Phelan expressed wonder and alarm in every feature and his arms flopped limply at his side as he muttered:

"Travers Gladwin--youse!"

"Don't listen to him, Phelan," cried Gladwin.

"Shut up!" Phelan turned on him.

"When I came home to-night," the thief pressed his advantage, "this man was here--robbing my house, dressed in your uniform--yes, and you yourself were helping him."

"But I didn't know," whined the distressed Phelan, yielding himself utterly to the toils of the master prevaricator.

"I don't think you did it intentionally--but why did you do it?" the thief let him down with a little less severity of emphasis.

"He said he wanted to play a joke. He--he---"

"Oh, don't be an idiot, Phelan," interposed Gladwin, putting his foot in it at the wrong time and receiving as his reward from the policeman a savage, "Close your face!"

"Oh, playing a joke, was he?" said the thief, smiling. "And did he offer you money. Now, no evasion--you had better tell me."

"Yes, sir," gulped Phelan, with murder in one eye for the real Gladwin and craven apology in the other for the impostor.

"And you took it?" sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, officer! Shame! Shame!" in tones of shocked reproach. "Let me see what he gave you--come now, it's your only chance."

Phelan hesitated, gulped some more, and at last produced the bill.

The thief took it from his trembling but unresisting hand, unfurled it, turned it over, held it up close to his eyes and suddenly laughed:

"Well, you certainly are easy--*counterfeit!*"

"What!" roared Phelan, and Travers Gladwin joined him in the exclamation.

"Will you swear that man gave you this bill?" cut in the thief, sharply, snatching out a pencil and marking the gold certificate across the corner.

"I will, sorr!" shouted Phelan. "I will, an'---"

"Very well! Now you see this mark in the corner--will you be able to identify it?"

"Yes, sorr." Phelan was fairly grovelling.

"Good," said the thief, and nonchalantly shoved the bill into his waistcoat pocket.

"See here, Phelan," protested Gladwin.

"Kape your mouth shut--I'd just like to take wan punch at yez."

Phelan meant it and took a step toward Gladwin when the thief stopped him and asked:

"Now, officer, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Gladwin--I got to get the patrol wagon here some way."

If Bateato had entered into an inflexible contract with himself not to utter another syllable before the break of day at least he might have eased Phelan's mind on that score and informed him that something ominously like a patrol wagon was rounding the corner at that moment. And if the art collector had not been so keenly amused at his facile conquest of the gullible bluecoat his alert ears might have warned him to say something entirely different from this:

"I'd call the wagon for you, officer, only I'm afraid these people might overpower you and get away with that trunk of pictures. You see what a nice mess they've been making of my picture gallery. Why, if I hadn't happened in to-night they would have walked off with half a million dollars' worth of paintings."

"You call the wagon, Mr. Gladwin," returned Phelan, grimly. "I kin handle the lot of o' them an' ten more like them."

"All right, officer, but be very careful--I shan't be long."

And turning with a mocking bow to Travers Gladwin, he sauntered out into the hallway and walked into the arms of Police Captain Stone and ten reserves.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BATEATO KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

Although the escaping thief was brushed back into the room rather rudely and Travers Gladwin cried out as he caught sight of the uniformed officer and his men, "By Jove, captain, I'm glad you've come," the consummate bluffer did not bat an eyelash or manifest the merest symptom of fear, stepping easily to one side and watching for the coming of his cue with feline alertness.

For a moment Captain Stone devoted himself only to the distribution of his men, posting them at all the windows and doors. When he was satisfied that every avenue of escape was covered he

turned to Phelan with the sharp query:

"What's all this, Phelan?"

"I caught them trying to get away with Mr. Gladwin's"---

"Yes, it was by the luckiest chance," broke in Travers Gladwin.

"Is this Mr. Gladwin?" the captain stopped him, curtly.

"No, the other one, captain," replied Phelan, indicating the thief; whereupon that gentleman bowed.

"Why, captain, I'm--" the real Gladwin started again.

"You've done well here, Phelan," the captain complimented him, ignoring the young millionaire.

"Thank ye, sorr," blushed Phelan.

"I should say he has done well." The thief came forward, with an approving nod toward the now ecstatic Officer 666.

"If it hadn't been for him," pursued the thief, "these thieves would have carried off my pictures. I would suggest, captain, that he be properly rewarded."

"Thank ye, sorr." Phelan's voice shook with gratitude.

"I'll see that he gets full credit in my report," said Captain Stone stiffly. "Now, Phelan, you go to the station for the patrol wagon. I sent it back, as one of the horses threw a shoe and got a bad fall. Tell the driver to get another horse at Murphy's stable and hurry back."

"Yes sorr."

Phelan went out, walking on air and humming to himself, "Sergt. Michael Phelan, no less," utterly forgetful of the sorry plight he was in not a half hour before.

Travers Gladwin was almost beside himself with chagrin. Again he made an impassioned plea to be heard.

"Now see here, Captain, I am Travers Gladwin"---

"Oh, you are, eh?" sneered the captain, scarcely deigning to look at him. "Well, we'll see about that. Where is the little Jap who notified me of this?"

Bateato had concealed himself behind a heavy piece of furniture and was yanked out into the open by a burly policeman.

"Here you," growled the captain, shaking his hand at the Jap, "you're Mr. Gladwin's servant, you said--which one of these men is your master?"

Bateato locked his teeth together and refused even to smile.

"Which is your master? Answer me!" demanded Captain Stone.

"The poor little devil is frightened to death," interposed the thief with a commiserating nod toward the Jap. He was playing his bluff to the limit.

"What scared him like that?" asked the captain.

"Oh, this gang here--some of the others got away--threatened to kill him."

"Now look here, Captain--" broke in Gladwin, making furious, yet vain, gestures at Bateato.

"Silence!" Captain Stone cut him off again.

"I admire this chap's nerve, Captain," laughed the thief. "It's monumental. He very nearly succeeded in bluffing Officer Phelan, but I guess you can take care of him all right--I must hurry off and get an expert to repair the damage done to these valuable paintings. Of course, you'll leave a man or two on guard."

Once more he gathered up his stick and overcoat and once more his exit was blocked--this time by Whitney Barnes.

It was only natural for that young man to misread the situation and conceive that Mrs. Elvira Burton had succeeded in her object of arresting his friend. So he blurted breathlessly:

"By Jove, Travers, I see I'm too late. I've been all over the city trying to warn you--I knew the police were on your track."

"Who the devil are you?" Captain Stone cut in on him.

"Another of the gang," responded the thief promptly. "He's got some story trumped up that he thinks will get him off."

"Well, we'll let him tell it then, and you"--indicating the thief--"had better wait and hear it."

There was something in the thief's manner that had fired a spark of suspicion in the officer's mind.

"Not a word about the girl," Travers managed to whisper to Barnes in the moment Captain Stone had turned to address the thief.

"I won't"--Barnes was replying when the Captain flung round on him.

"Stop that whispering, and come over here where I can get a good look at you. Which one of these men is the real Gladwin?"

"He is, of course!" Barnes nodded toward his friend. The truth of the situation had at last dawned upon him.

The thief smiled at Captain Stone and shook his head as if in compliment of the nerve of some criminals.

"H'm," said the captain, turning to Barnes again. "And when did you find out that there was some one else who claimed to be Travers Gladwin?"

"Why," replied Barnes briskly, "when Gladwin and I were here together this afternoon. The doorbell rang and two"---

His friend shook a vigorous warning. Barnes stopped.

"Yes, and two what?"

"Well, you see, the doorbell rang"---

"Yes, you said that!" snapped Captain Stone. "The doorbell rang and two"---

"Yes, and two minutes after that it rang again--rang in an extraordinary kind of way, you know, as if whoever was ringing it--was ringing it because--because they wanted to come in--come in in a hurry, you see. Well, I went to the door"---

"Why did *you* go to the door?" demanded Captain Stone.

"Well, you see, the bell rang"---

"Don't go back to that again! Why did you go to the door?"

"Well, I can't at this minute remember exactly, but I'm under the impression I went to--to find out who was ringing the bell, just like that, as it were."

"That's enough of you," snorted Captain Stone. "Ryan (to one of his men) take this one and slip the nippers on him."

"See here, Captain, I can explain this."--Travers Gladwin essayed again, as he saw his friend struggling in the grip of a blue-coated giant and spluttering his protests against being handcuffed.

"You can't explain anything to me," was the best he got from Captain Stone.

During this spirited dialogue the thief had gone to the side of Helen Burton, who had remained motionless where she had risen from her chair, playing the part of a helpless victim in the seemingly hopeless tangle.

"Now then, Helen," he said to her in his old tone of endearment, "we can go. You see where this impostor stands."

"With you--no!"

There was no mistaking the uncompromising emphasis of her denial.

Captain Stone set out to distribute his prisoners, motioning to one policeman to take care of Gladwin and to another to look after the Jap, who would be needed as a witness.

He came last to Helen just as she had repulsed the man she was to have eloped with that night. Captain Stone had had experience enough with women to be able to distinguish between types. He was on the point of ordering another of his men to take charge of Helen when he paused and studied her more closely. His men were starting for the door with their prisoners when he signalled them to stop.

"Wait," he said, "I wish to question this lady."

He turned to Helen, when there came swiftly into the room Lieutenant Detective Kearney of the Central Office.

Kearney was every inch a Central Office man, and had been long enough at Headquarters to lose the heavy bovine set of the man who pounds the pavement. A strapping big fellow, with graying hair and a pair of round bullet eyes that searched you with needle points, his very appearance was sufficient corroboration of all the thrilling stories the newspapers printed of his skill and courage.

"Hello, Kearney! What do you want?" Captain Stone addressed him as he stopped in the doorway and surveyed the remarkable scene before him.

"I'm looking for Travers Gladwin," replied the detective shortly.

"I'm Travers Gladwin," spoke up the thief, easily, but holding his head so that Kearney could see only the profile.

"That's my name!" exclaimed Travers Gladwin in the same breath with the impostor.

Kearney looked from one to the other, fairly pistolling his scrutiny.

"Oh, both of you named Travers Gladwin?" he asked with a puzzled expression.

"That one's a fake," interposed Captain Stone, pointing to the real Gladwin. "This"--nodding toward the impostor--"is the real Travers Gladwin."

Kearney's face showed no more expression than if it had been cut for a cameo, but when the thief asked him with perfect self-command: "What can I do for you?" he came on into the room and stopped directly in front of him.

"I have a warrant for your arrest," he said, abruptly, and stuck his hand in his pocket for the document.

"My arrest! For what?" said the thief with a beautifully feigned amazement and a little laugh of incredulity.

"Cradle snatching--abduction," jerked out Kearney, unfolding the paper.

"That is rich!" laughed the thief.

"I got the warrant from"--Kearney stopped and his little bullet eyes went to work on the thief from the ground up. He was measuring every inch of the man with an eye that had been trained for years to keep tabs on a multitude of marked and measured men.

"Would you mind coming over here--a step or two closer, Mr.--Gladwin?" he said tensely.

The thief stepped toward him and directly under the electrolier, while the others in the room stood like statues, looking on.

As Kearney continued his searching examination of the unflinching and still smiling man, whose head was on a level with his and whose body was every inch as big and well set up, Captain Stone broke in nervously:

"What is it, Kearney?"

"I think there's some mistake, sir," said the detective, grimly. "Are you sure this man is Travers Gladwin?"

"You seem to be in some doubt about it," said the thief, dropping his thumbs in the pockets of his waistcoat and raising his chin a little. Whatever was going on inside him, his eyes were twinkling with amusement.

"I am," Kearney retorted; then to Captain Stone, "What is this case Captain?"

"Picture robbery."

"Picture robbery! I was sure of it! You've made a mistake, Captain. I know this man!"

The sentences came out like a succession of pistol shots, while his eyes never left the face of the thief.

"I know you," he attacked the smile again. It was a bullet-proof smile and never wavered.

"Well, who is he?" interrupted the real Travers Gladwin, eagerly.

"He's the greatest picture *expert* in--the world!"

"You flatter me," said the thief with a bow, and a side glance at Helen Burton, who was gazing at him as if both fascinated and repelled.

"You admit it then," said Kearney roughly, unable to disguise the triumph he felt at this identification of a man he had never seen before.

"I am not so egotistical," the other bowed, "but I will go along with you with pleasure and see what you are able to prove."

"Are you sure about this, Kearney?" asked Captain Stone, still doubting and hating to admit he had been led into an egregious blunder.

"Certain," retorted the detective. "He's been fooling them on the other side for several years, but they nearly got him in Scotland Yard two months ago. I got a full report on him from his straight eyebrows and gray eyes down to the cut of his vest, with picture and measurement attached. His real name is Alf Wilson--there were a hundred men on his trail, but he made a getaway."

"I don't suppose there's any use trying to deny all this now," said Wilson, without the slightest change of tone, shoving his hands into his trousers pockets and lifting his head in contemplation of the pictures on the wall.

"Not the slightest," returned the detective, snatching a pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket.

"Wait just a moment, officer," interrupted Travers Gladwin. "I'd like to ask this man one question."

"Delighted," cried the picture expert, turning and showing all his teeth in a mocking smile.

Travers Gladwin pointed to the portrait of "The Blue Boy."

"How did you know I bought that picture in London upon certain misrepresentations?"

"I was the man behind the gun--think it over."

He swung round to face the spurious Gainsborough. As he did so something caught his eye and he moved toward the portrait. Gladwin followed and inquired:

"But you not only knew it was a fake, but when I bought it and what I paid for it."

"I knew about it," came the jaunty reply, "because *I* painted it."

He moved another step nearer the painting as Gladwin gasped.

"Yes," he went on lightly, running his hand along the bottom of the frame, "according to this gentleman," and he nodded over his shoulder to Kearney, who had kept pace with him, backing to cover the doorway, "your 'Blue Boy' was painted by the greatest picture expert in the world!"

As the last word came laughingly from his lips the room was plunged in darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

REPARTEE AND A REVOLVER MUZZLE.

The inky blackness fell upon the room with palpable suddenness--like a blinding flash, numbing for a moment the senses of all who had been taken by surprise. The reflex of the shock was manifested in a very babel of incoherent shouts, jostlings and stumblings and sharp collisions with the furniture.

"Turn up the lights," shouted Captain Stone, amid the tumult.

Travers Gladwin made a blind dive toward the wall and stumbled headlong over the great antique chest which stood to one side of where he and the thief had stood contemplating "The Blue Boy." In stumbling against the chest he felt something that was a revelation to him by the time he found the switch button and brought back a flood of light.

"Quick, men, cover the doors--don't let any one get out," yelled Captain Stone, pivoting on his heel as his eyes vainly sought the picture expert.

"He's gone!" cried Kearney.

"Yes, up the stairs--I hear him," yelled Gladwin. "There are two back stairways and the roof. There are two basement exits--post your men out there, and down through that hallway on the left--the panel door--that leads to the kitchen. Barnes, you and Bateato take the young lady up to my study--quick!--I'll look after this room."

The most remarkable thing about it was that every command the young man shouted was obeyed. Even Kearney was fooled and rushed headlong up the stairs, followed by two policemen and Barnes, who was yelling: "Hey! come back here and unlock me! How can I hunt that chap with these handcuffs on?"

He might as well have appealed to the moon.

Bateato fairly dragged Helen up the stairs after him and guided her to the magnificently furnished study and den to the right of the staircase, when he switched on the lights and became furiously active in the interest of the young girl's comfort.

Captain Stone had rushed out into the street and posted men on the stoop and at the basement exits; then, followed by the last lone patrolman of his squad, he darted through the alley at the side of the mansion which led to the rear yard.

The emptying of the room was accomplished in a few seconds, whereupon Gladwin hastened to the doorway, reached for the folding doors and hauled them to, fastening the latch. Next he shut the door to the kitchen hallway and fastened that, when, with a sigh of relief, he walked to the long carved oak table that flanked the window, hoisted himself on it, produced his gold cigarette case, took out a cigarette, set fire to it, snapped the case and returned it to his pocket.

While he inhaled a deep breath of stimulating smoke his eyes were fixed upon the great chest directly in front of him.

He was sitting easily on the table, kicking his legs, and he continued just in that attitude when the lid of the chest lifted a few inches and a small brilliantly nickelled revolver came out and covered him.

"I'm waiting for yez, Mither Gladwin," chuckled the young man.

By some strange psychologic freak he was not in the least dismayed by the ominous menace of that shining muzzle, which gradually came further out as the arm and head of the picture expert followed it.

Once the thief had glimpsed the young man and made out that they had the room to themselves he came out of the chest as lightly and noiselessly as he had enveloped himself in it. But his smile was gone now and in its place there was the wariness of the hunted animal. Still covering Gladwin and surveying the room he said in low, level tones:

"If you move it'll be the last act of your life, McGinty."

"Murphy, sorr," purred Gladwin, his face abeam.

"I like your nerve, young un."

"I've been taking lessons from the man who invented nerve."

"Well, you don't seem anxious to give the alarm," said Wilson, toying with the little automatic and turning it over in the expanse of his palm.

"No, I'm afraid it might make you nervous."

"Might make me so nervous that this gun would go off, eh?"

A shadow of the old smile came back as he went stealthily to the door and listened.

"You seem to enjoy smoking," said the peer of art collectors, turning his back to Gladwin.

"Don't you?"

"Yes."

"Have you time to smoke a cigar?"

"Is it a good one?"

"I don't know--it's the one you gave me while I was Officer 666."

Gladwin tossed the cigar to the thief, who caught it deftly and inserted it between his lips. "And here's some more of your possessions," added the young man, drawing out the bribe money he had accepted while he masqueraded in the officer's uniform.

"Thanks," said Wilson, as he caught the money, "and here's your little yellow boy, though I wish that intellectual giant of a cop were here so I could hire his uniform for a bit."

"You amaze me by your generosity," murmured Gladwin as he pocketed the \$500 bill.

"Oh," said the other easily, while he again listened at the door. "I'm not a regular crook--I'm in the picture business."

"Still, if you kept that bill it might help you get better accommodations when you reach Sing Sing."

"If I don't need it till then I won't need it for a long, long time."

"You mean you think you're going to escape?"

Gladwin slid down from the table and leaned against it, making no effort to conceal the admiration he experienced for this man's superhuman aplomb.

"And with guards all around the house and policemen tearing thirty rooms apart upstairs and camping on the roof scuttle--yes, and more coming, maybe."

"I venture to hope so," chuckled the other. "I admit it's close enough to be interesting."

"Well, I'll say one thing for you," the young millionaire said earnestly, "you're the coolest chap I ever hope to meet. You're a marvel."

"Built to order to work in story books, eh? Well, to be candid with you, McGinty, there are times when I'm not so cool as I look. I'm almost human."

"Those cops will finish their work soon--then they'll come in here," Gladwin warned him.

"I'm listening for them," said Wilson softly, putting his ear to the door again.

"Just because your pistol prevents me from calling them now, don't think"---

"This gun isn't stopping you," came the short reply. "If you wanted to call them you'd take a chance--I've found that out in the last hundred seconds or so."

"Thank you for the compliment, but I"---

"Well, I'll prove it," the thief intervened, and tossed the gun to Gladwin, who caught it as if it were something hot. "Go ahead and call them."

"How do you know I wouldn't call them?" the young man asked, examining the automatic and finding it empty.

"Don't be a child," shrugged the other. "You closed these doors, and you butted in about the 'Blue Boy' just as that Central Office owl produced his jewelry. Yes, and you stumbled against the chest and knew that I was in it."

"But I say," asked Gladwin, abruptly. "How did you come to use my name?"

"It wasn't safe to use mine, and when I met Miss---that girl--your name was in my mind--I borrowed it."

"That's the thing I can't forgive you for," said Gladwin, regretfully--"to deceive her as you did. That was rotten."

"I don't care for your opinion on that," said the picture expert, warmly. "How can a man like you understand a man like me? It can't be done. We're further apart than the poles."

"But you must see, Wilson--that's the name, isn't it?"

"It will do for the nonce, kind sir."

"But you must see that the game is up. If you take my advice you won't even try to escape."

"Then I won't take your advice," said Wilson, softly.

"But all these policemen know you're a big prize. If they find you and you break for it, they'll shoot--and shoot to kill if necessary."

The thief flung round on him and his face was suddenly drawn and serious.

"Death, my dear Gladwin, is the very least of my troubles, if it will only come like that."

"By Jove! I like you--and I hope you escape!"

"I know you do," said Wilson, shaking his head, "but not altogether on my account. You're

thinking of her--the girl. You don't want it to be known that she was going to marry me."

"To be frank, yes. They're coming now. Quick! Do something!"

The thief seized from the floor one of the portières he had torn down to wrap the canvases in, wound it about him and darted behind the curtains that screened the window. As he vanished Gladwin went to the door and heard the voice of his friend, Whitney Barnes, demanding admission.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HANDCUFFS AND LOVE.

Helen Burton could not have found a cozier place to faint in than that ultra-luxurious den of Travers Gladwin. Every chair and divan in the place invited one to swoon within its folds.

The young man had ordered his decorator to provide him with a chamber wherein stiffness and formality would be impossible unless one stood erect. The decorator had spent money with a lavish hand upon Spanish leathers and silken stuffs from the near East and the Orient and he had laid these trappings over the softest of swan's down. Once you sank upon them you could not help a sensation of utter peace and relaxation.

That final and irrevocable blasting of her ideal was a shock upon many shocks that the young girl had experienced within the course of a few hours and that she reached the den on her feet was due more to Bateato's strength and agility than to any nervous or physical force within her slender body.

The little Jap had fairly flown up the stairs with her in such fashion that she had no distinct recollection of her feet touching any stable surface. Then he had turned a sharp corner while she seemed to stream behind him like a fluttering pennant, and next she had felt herself sink into a soft, delicious embrace, when her senses left her and she seemed to drop pleasantly through fathomless space.

It was a great crimson chair embroidered with yellow poppies into which Bateato had dropped his burden, then switched on a myriad of tiny lamps suspended from the ceiling by slim chains of different lengths or gleaming from dark niches and embrasures in the tapestry-hung walls.

All these subdued and colored lights mingled to produce a wonderfully soft and reposeful effect, and when at last Helen opened her eyes--and her swoon had been of only a few minutes' duration--she was sure that the setting was a dream and half expected some impossible creature of phantasmagoria to rise from the floor and address her.

Then she felt an intermittent draught upon her cheek and looked up to see Whitney Barnes fanning her with an elaborate contrivance of peacock feathers that was alleged to have once done duty in the harem of Abdul Hamid, one-time Sultan of Turkey.

She was not sure at first that this strange looking being who fanned her in such an amazing fashion was the young friend of the real Travers Gladwin who had appeared on the scene from time to time during that fateful afternoon, for his features were far from being in repose. Positive torture was written on his clean-cut boyish face as he wielded that fast fan in his handcuffed hands as if it were a task imposed upon him by some evil spirit.

Certainly there was no grace in the savage gestures of his arms as his wrists twisted and writhed in their shackles, but he stuck to his task desperately, now and then hissing over his shoulder at Bateato to learn why in thunder he didn't find smelling salts or whiskey or brandy or something with which to restore the young lady to consciousness.

And on his part, Bateato was racing about like a scared mouse, diving into mysterious chests and cabinets or under divans or climbing up the walls to explore recessed shelves. His activities were confined to that one chamber, for a big, implacable policeman stood at the entrance, with orders to keep his eye on the young woman and the Jap and see that they did not escape or attempt to assist the vanished picture expert in concealing himself or getting away.

As Helen's dazed faculties gradually resumed their normal activities and she realized that Whitney Barnes was a reality, the humor of the situation suddenly struck her fancy and she smiled. She was smiling with eyes and lips when young Barnes turned back his head from another reproach of Bateato and looked to see how she was coming on.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were dead. I wanted to go out for a doctor, but these confounded policemen wouldn't let me--yes, and they wouldn't unlock me. Have I fanned enough? I'm pretty well tuckered out, and these feathers get in one's nose so. Then this is an extraordinary kind of a fan--they use them in harems or something of the sort, and I've never fanned in harems."

"Please stop, then," laughed Helen, "and I'm a thousand times obliged to you. If I could only have a glass of water I think I would be myself again."

Bateato had at last pried into a cabinet that contained a decanter of brandy and strange looking Moorish goblets, and from some curtained enclosure he obtained cold water from a faucet. A sip of the potent brandy and draught of water brought the color back to the girl's cheeks and the light to her eyes. The change was so reassuring that Whitney Barnes actually beamed and for a few moments dropped all thought of his handcuffs.

"My, but you are beautiful!" he said impulsively. "I don't blame Travers for going daffy in the Ritz, and do you know your eyes are exactly like your cousin's!"

Helen laughed in spite of herself at the young man's headlong gush of words, then became suddenly serious.

"We haven't time to talk about eyes now," she said soberly. "You must assist me in telling these policemen how I brought this terrible embarrassment upon Mr. Gladwin."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Barnes. "He wouldn't hear of it. He'd cut off both his arms before he'd allow your name to be dragged into such a sensation. And I'd add mine, too, willingly, with these bracelets on them."

"But that detective said he had a warrant for Mr. Gladwin for eloping with me," cried Helen, blushing scarlet. "And, you know"---

"Yes, I know you're going to weep or faint or something else. Tell me about your cousin--she's not m-m-married?"

"Sadie married!" ejaculated Helen. "Why, she's deathly afraid of men. She's the most timid little thing in the world."

"Good!" cried Barnes, enthusiastically. "These handcuffs are not half bad, now you tell me that."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Helen, her eyes twinkling.

"Oh, nothing," said Barnes, trying to look unconcerned. "She's very young?" he added quickly.

"A year younger than I am," said Helen, mischievously. There was something positively fascinating about the intense seriousness that had fallen upon the nervous features of Whitney Barnes.

"She's not too young to marry?" was his next query.

"N-no," Helen hesitated, "though I suppose you'd have to ask Auntie."

"Well, you didn't have to do that," he said in alarm. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he added quickly, "please forgive me."

"You are forgiven," said Helen, with a catch in her breath; then resolutely, "but that is all over with. It wasn't really real--only a bad dream."

"Of course, it wasn't real," sympathized Barnes. "That fellow just hypnotized you--and my eye, but he's a wonderful looking chap--sort of a Hercules and Adonis all thrown into one. But to get back to Sadie--I'm going to marry her."

"You are!" Helen half started from her chair.

"Be calm; be calm," and he waved her down with his shackled hands. "When I say I'm going to marry her I merely state a fond belief I have been cherishing since, m'm--well since a very long time ago to-day or yesterday, for to-day is to-morrow by this time, you know. Now don't stop me--I say I am going to marry your cousin because I believe in Destiny with a big D. Do you?"

"I did," said Helen grimly, "but now I don't."

"Oh, yes, you do," Barnes breezed on. "You may not think that you believe you do, but you really do, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the destiny you thought out--as far as the name goes--Travers Gladwin, I mean--comes true after all. But to come back to Sadie and my Destiny. I have really got to marry her--orders from headquarters!"

"Orders from headquarters!" gasped Helen.

"Exactly! My governor--that is, my dad--that is, the pater--wrung a promise from me, issued a command, a ukase, an ultimatum--said: 'Whitney Barnes, you go right out and get married and bring home a lot of grand-children.' No; that wasn't it exactly--now let me think a moment. Yes, I've got it--he said: 'You've simply got to marry and settle down or I'll turn you out into the street.'"

"Wasn't that enough to take the wind out of you, when you'd never given the idea of marriage a thought. Simply bowled me over. At first I refused point blank, but when I saw how cut up the poor old dad was about it I shook his hand and said: 'Pater, done--I'll go right out and find a wife.' And I did."

"What!" said Helen faintly. "You went right out and got married?"

"No, no, no, my dear cousin. I simply found Sadie."

"And have you asked her? Not surely while we were here this afternoon."

"Oh, I saw her later--when she came to-night with your aunt, while your aunt was searching all over the place for you. Not that I really asked her then, but we looked at each other, you know, and I think we liked each other--and that's a big start. I just know we'll get married--we're soul-mates! There isn't any doubt of it."

"Well, it strikes me," said Helen severely, "that you're a trifle conceited."

"Indeed I am," was his startling response. "You've got to be, in love. If you don't think you're pretty fine how are you going to convince anybody else that you are? But you'll have to excuse me for a moment--these bracelets are cutting my wrists to pieces. I must find that man who locked me up. You must stay here till I come back--I won't be a minute," and the young man darted out of the room with a ludicrous diving motion of his arms as he parted the heavy crimson silk hangings at the doorway and caromed against the big policeman on guard.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

KEARNEY MEETS HIS MATCH.

There was no turning Whitney Barnes away with a soft answer. His appeals for admission were rising to a strident pitch when his friend opened the door and yanked him in.

"Have you seen him?" demanded Barnes, looking about wildly.

"No," Gladwin returned. "I think he escaped."

"Oh, I don't mean the robber Johnny," complained Barnes, shaking out his handcuffed wrists. "I mean the damned idiot who locked these things on me."

"He's searching the house," said Gladwin, smiling at his friend's tragic earnestness.

Detective Kearney came into the room alert as a race horse.

"We've been through the house from cellar to roof," he spat out while his eyes searched every corner of the room.

"I say--look here," said Barnes, "can you unlock me?"

"No!" Kearney would not even look at him.

"Confound it, somebody ought to unlock me!" exclaimed the frantic Barnes. "This is the most annoying position I was ever in in my life. My valet even couldn't undress me with these things on."

"What's out that way?" asked Kearney, pointing to the panel door that opened upon the backstairs hallway.

"Kitchen," said Gladwin, going to the door and opening it.

"Oh, yes," said Kearney, "the captain's back there?"

"But look here, detective," cried Barnes again, "who was that inordinate ass who locked me up?"

"Ryan!" said Kearney, freezing a smile as it formed on his lips.

"Where is he?"

"On the roof."

"What the deuce is he doing on the roof?"

"Searching it."

"Well," stormed Barnes, "I'll go up there and if he don't unlock me I'll push him off."

He dashed out of the room and up the stairs.

"Funny thing where that man got to, Mr. Gladwin," mused the Central Office man, with a keen glance from under his heavy eyebrows.

"Yes, those chaps are clever, aren't they?" returned the young man with affected unconcern. "I suppose he's miles away by this time."

"I don't think he's gone very far," rejoined Kearney, his voice bristling with suspicion. "He couldn't have got away without the men outside seeing him. We've got the block surrounded now. He's here in this house, Mr. Gladwin--I guess you know that."

"I don't know anything of the kind," Gladwin denied, with a trifle too much emphasis. A policeman appeared in the doorway and Kearney called to him, "Ryan, I thought you were on the roof."

"Sergeant Burke sent me down," responded Ryan. "We've got the roofs covered both way."

"Did you see the man you put the bracelets on?" asked Kearney.

"No," replied Ryan, "but I heard a lot of noise going up one of the back stairways."

"You better go and find him," urged Travers Gladwin. "He's in an awful state."

"No," countermanded Kearney, "never mind him now."

"But you're wasting time here," persisted Gladwin. "I can look after this room."

"Oh, no, you can't!" Kearney flashed back.

"Why not?"

"Because you're under arrest. I was after you when I happened to find the other fellow. I haven't any idea you'll try and escape, Mr. Gladwin, but a warrant is a warrant and duty's duty."

"But that warrant wasn't meant for me."

"No?"

Kearney's eyes widened with surprise. "Was the girl running off with that crook?" he asked quickly.

"No," Gladwin corrected, realizing his break.

"Then you better go along with Ryan. Ryan, you take him upstairs and sit by him till I send for you."

"See here," the young man began to splutter as the giant Ryan seized him and walked him on air out of the room and up the stairs.

Kearney went to the folding doors and shut them.

"He's in this room somewhere," muttered the detective, going to the portières that curtained the window leading out to the balcony.

He was almost touching Wilson when the latter suddenly enveloped him in the portière he had wrapped around himself and hurled the big detective to the floor. As Kearney was untangling himself Wilson darted between the portières, glanced out the window and saw that a leap from the balcony would land him in the arms of three patrolmen. He shook open the window and then shrank back into the far corner of the embrasure.

Kearney was on his feet again and sprang out to the balcony.

"He came out this way," he yelled to the men below. "Did he jump off?"

Kearney darted back into the room, looked everywhere, ran to the folding doors and flung them open. Then he looked back at the panel door, noticed that it was ajar and dived for it.

"He's hiding somewhere in this black alley," he said with an oath, and disappeared.

A moment later Wilson peeked out and re-entered the room. He had scarcely left his place of concealment when Officer No. 666 burst in.

"Oh, there ye are, Mr. Gladwin!" said Phelan, with a lovely grin.

"Yes, I'm here," nodded Wilson.

"I just come back with another bunch of cops," said Phelan, "but I hear the crook got away. He's a smooth snake fer ye."

"No, I think he's still in the house," laughed Wilson, "and I'd like to have you get the credit of catching him, Phelan. You go outside and report to the captain, then come back here. Maybe I can help you find him."

"Thank ye, sorr," said Phelan, obeying the suggestion.

"Here comes another one," breathed the thief, hearing a heavy tread and crossing the room to the big ornamental fireplace which had never known a spark or speck of soot. There was a mammoth opening in the chimney and Wilson vanished up it as Kearney plunged back into the room.

As the detective entered through the panel door, Watkins in full chauffeur regalia appeared from the hallway.

"Well, who sent you?" Kearney pounced on him.

"I don't know," Watkins returned. "Some man--Gladwin, I think, is the name. I was sent here for a lady."

"Well, you sit out in the hall and wait," snapped Kearney, who again proceeded to explore the room, muttering and cursing.

The voice of Travers Gladwin in heated argument upstairs with Officer Ryan became audible.

"I'll settle that fresh kid!" Kearney ejaculated, and made a break for the stairs.

His departure was Wilson's cue to let himself down from the chimney. He signalled Watkins, who was sitting in the hall. Watkins glided in.

"By George!" exclaimed Wilson, "we are going it some in here. You certainly are taking big chances butting in. I didn't think you had the nerve. It's a hundred to one against me, but I've beaten bigger odds than that. You get up that chimney and I'll plant myself in the chest. Quick, they're coming down again."

Watkins went up the chimney with the sinuous speed of a snake, and the picture expert went into the chest with the agility of a wolf spider ducking into its trap.

They were coming from all directions this time--Gladwin down the stairs, about fourteen jumps ahead of Kearney, proclaiming that he would telephone his lawyer and that he could put up \$5,000,000 in bonds for bail if need be. Phelan was coming through the front door and Captain Stone through the hallway from the kitchen.

Glimpsing Gladwin, Phelan made a flying dive for him, yelling, "I got him! I got him!" They rolled on the floor in a heap.

"Have you got him, Phelan?" cried Captain Stone, rushing through the room and into the hallway.

"I have, sorr," responded Phelan, proudly, getting to his feet and pulling up his captive.

"What the devil's this," bawled Captain Stone, recognizing Gladwin.

"The thief, sorr," responded Phelan.

"The thief, hell! That's Mr. Gladwin!"

"W-w-w-what?" stuttered Phelan. Once again he entered into a condition of complete mental paralysis.

"Has he hurt you, sir?" asked the captain, solicitously, noticing that Gladwin's face was writhing.

"Nothing mortal," winced the young man.

"What's the matter with you, Phelan," the captain jumped on him. "Have you been drunk today?"

"No, sorr," gurgled Phelan, "I"---

"Don't try to stop me, officer, I've come for my niece," crashed the shrill voice of Mrs. Elvira Burton. She had seized a dramatic moment for her re-entry.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PILING ON PHELAN'S AGONY.

Mrs. Burton would have arrived much earlier into the midst of the maelstrom of events at the Gladwin mansion had not Fate in the shape of a tire-blowout intervened.

She had set out from Police Headquarters with Detective Kearney as a passenger and she had urged her red-headed chauffeur to pay not the slightest heed to speed laws or any other laws. He had obeyed with such enthusiasm that the blowout had occurred at the intersection of Fifth avenue and Forty-second street.

Late as the hour was there was a large crowd gathered to hear the society leader of Omaha deliver a lecture in strange French and caustic English.

Kearney had transshipped to a taxicab, which accounted for his earlier arrival.

"Who's in charge here?" cried Mrs. Burton, sweeping into the room with all sails set and drawing to the storm.

"I am," replied Captain Stone, none too pleasantly as the gold lorgnettes were waved under his nose.

"Well, I came for my niece--produce her at once," insisted the panting woman.

"You'll have to wait a few minutes," answered Captain Stone, grimly. "We're otherwise engaged at present."

"But I have a warrant--I've ordered Mr. Gladwin's arrest!" she shrilled.

"We'll attend to that later," snapped the captain. "We're looking for a thief who broke in here tonight."

"A thief!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton. "Well, I saw him."

"What?" asked the amazed officer.

"Yes, when I was here before, and there he is now, only he's got a policeman's uniform on."

Mrs. Burton pointed an accusing finger at Michael Phelan, who proceeded to turn livid.

"You saw that man here before?" asked the wondering captain.

"Yes. He was in his shirt sleeves and when he saw me he ran away to hide."

"Are you sure about this?" asked Captain Stone slowly, turning and scowling at the condemned Phelan.

"I should say I am," declared the relentless Mrs. Burton. "How could I ever forget that face?"

"C-c-c-captain, I-I-I w-w-want to explain"--chattered Phelan.

"There'll be time enough for that," the captain checked him. "For the present you camp right here in this room. Don't you budge an inch from it. That thief is somewhere in this house and we've got to find him."

"Give me my niece first," cried Mrs. Burton.

Captain Stone ignored the request and shouted to Kearney and the three men who had followed him into the room:

"Come, we are wasting time. This house must be searched again and searched thoroughly. I don't believe you have half done it. Lead the way, Kearney, we'll begin on the next floor."

As they went out Sadie Burton timidly approached Whitney Barnes, who was still making the rounds of every policeman in the house and pleading to be unlocked.

"How do you do--what is the matter?" she said timidly, looking up into Barnes's distressed face.

"I don't do at all," replied Barnes, tragically, folding his arms in an effort to conceal the handcuffs.

"Why, you seem to have a chill," Sadie sympathized, with real concern in her voice.

"I should say I have," gasped Barnes, "a most awful chill. But it may pass off. Excuse me, here's a new policeman I haven't asked yet." The young man crossed the room to Phelan.

"Have you got a key to these infernal shackles?" he asked, while Sadie looked wonderingly after him.

"I've got a key to nothin'," growled Phelan. "Don't talk to me--I'd like to kill some of yez."

Barnes retreated, backing into Mrs. Burton, who turned and seized him.

"Do you know where my niece is?" she demanded.

"Oh, yes, she's here, only you're breaking my arm."

"Where is she and where is that fiend Gladwin?"

"Oh, *the fiend Gladwin* just went upstairs to her. She's upstairs asleep."

"Asleep!"

"Oh, I don't know--go up and find her, that is--I beg your pardon--I'll lead the way--come, Miss Sadie."

The handcuffed youth led the procession up the stairs, leaving Officer 666 as solitary sentinel in the great drawing room and picture gallery.

"Well, I guess I'm dished fer fair," groaned Phelan as he mournfully surveyed the deserted room and allowed his eyes to rest on the portrait of a woman who looked out at him from mischievous blue eyes.

"An' all fer a pair o' them eyes," he added, wistfully. "'Tis tough."

He might have gone on at some length with this doleful soliloquy had not a hand suddenly closed over his mouth with the grip of a steel trap.

Alf Wilson had come out of the chest as noiselessly as he had originally entered it and good fortune favored him to the extent of placing Phelan with his back to him while his troubled mind was steeped in a mixture of love and despair.

As the thief pounced upon the ill-fated Officer 666 he uttered, "Pst! Pst! Watkins!"

That sinuous individual writhed out of the fireplace and came to his assistance.

"Get his elbows and put your knee in his back," instructed the thief, "while I reach for my ether-gun. Thank God! Here it is in my pocket."

Phelan struggled in a fruitless effort to tear himself free, but Wilson's grip was the grip of unyielding withes of steel and the slim and wiry Watkins was just as muscular for his weight.

It was the task of a moment for the picture expert to bring round the little silver device he called his ether-gun. Phelan was gasping for breath through his nostrils, and Wilson had only to press the bulb once or twice before the policeman's muscles relaxed and he fell limply into Watkins's arms.

"That'll hold him for ten minutes at least," breathed Wilson. "That's right, Watkins, prop him up while I get his belt and coat off--then into the chest."

Phelan was completely insensible, but his weight and the squareness of his bulk made it a strenuous task to support him and at the same time remove his coat. Only a man of Wilson's size and prodigious strength could have accomplished the feat in anything like the time required, and both he and Watkins were purple and breathless when they lowered the again unfrocked Officer 666 into the chest and piled portières and a small Persian rug on top of him.

While Watkins held up the lid the thief tore off his claw-hammer coat and stuffed that down into the chest. In another instant he had forced his shoulders into the uniform coat, donned the cap and buckled on the belt.

"Now break for it, Watkins," he gasped, fighting the buttons into the buttonholes. "Take it easy out the front door. I'll go out on the balcony and call down to the men in the street that it's all right. Start the engine in the car and keep it going till I can make my getaway. Now!"

Watkins vanished out the door at the psychological moment. Captain Stone and Kearney were coming down the stairs engaged in earnest conversation. So engrossed were they when they entered the room that they failed to notice the absence of Officer 666, whose uniform was strutting on the balcony while he himself lay anæsthetized in the chest.

"How could he have been hiding in those portières, Kearney?" Captain Stone was saying. "I looked through them before I left the room."

"I don't know how, Captain," replied Kearney, "but he was and Gladwin knew it."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive."

"I say, captain, do you know where Mr. Ryan is?" intervened the roving Barnes, who seemed to have bobbed up from nowhere in particular with Sadie in his train.

"He may be in the cellar and he may be on the roof," snapped the captain. "Don't bother me now!"

"But I must bother you, by Jove," persisted the frantic Barnes. "I demand that you send that man to unlock me. I'm not a prisoner or that sort of thing."

Captain Stone ignored him, addressing Kearney:

"Well, if he isn't out now--he can't get out without an airship. Still we had better search some more below stairs. Where's that man Phelan gone? Look out on the balcony, Kearney."

Kearney stepped to the curtains, pulled them back, dropped them, and nodded, "He's out there."

"Very well, let's go down into the cellar and work up. There isn't a room in the house now that isn't guarded."

"But, dammit, Captain," exploded Barnes again, rattling his handcuffs.

"Don't annoy me--can't you see I'm busy," was all the satisfaction he got as the captain and the Central Office man left the room.

Sadie came forward shyly as the policemen left.

"Did you find out where he is?" she asked anxiously.

"In the cellar or on the roof. When I get to the roof he is in the cellar, and when I reach the cellar he is on the roof. He's more elusive than a ghost."

"Whoever are you talking about?" cried Sadie.

"Mr. Ryan, of course."

"But I don't mean Mr. Ryan--I mean the chauffeur who came for Helen. I heard Mr. Kearney speaking about him upstairs."

"Oh, there's a chauffeur after her, too?" said Barnes, enigmatically.

"Yes, and wasn't it fortunate that the police arrived just in time to save her."

"The police!" sniffed Barnes in disgust. "A lot they had to do with saving her."

"Didn't they really?"

"They did not. They bungled the whole thing up horribly. Why they'd have brought in a parson to marry them if it hadn't been"--Barnes managed to blush.

"Then who did prevent the elopement?" asked Sadie, eagerly. "I can't get a word out of Helen on account of Auntie El."

"Can't you guess?" said Barnes, mysteriously, looking down upon her with a sudden return of ardor.

"Oh, did you do it?" and Sadie looked up at him from under her lashes.

"Didn't I tell you I'd do it?" swelled Barnes.

Sadie thanked him with her wonderfully expressive eyes.

"Oh, it was nothing," shrugged Barnes.

"You're the nicest man I ever met," blurted Sadie, with astounding frankness.

"Do you mean that?" cried Barnes, rapturously.

"Indeed I mean it," admitted Sadie, timidly, backing away from his burning glances.

"Then you won't mind my saying," said Barnes fervently, "that you're the nicest ma'--I mean girl--I ever met. Why, would you believe it--confound it, here's that man Gladwin again. Please come upstairs and I'll finish, handcuffs or no handcuffs."

CHAPTER XL.

STRIKING WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.

As Travers Gladwin skimmed up the stairs to warn Helen of the arrival of her aunt, he was thinking on four sides of his brain at the same time and revolving together so many lightning plans, that the result was a good deal of a jumble. In consequence, he was wild-eyed, out of breath and more than a trifle incoherent when he parted the crimson curtains of the den and precipitately entered.

"Your aunt," he began as he checked his momentum and stopped against a table beside which Miss Burton was seated, "but don't get up--and don't be frightened. She need never know. I'll take the blame for everything. I am the Travers Gladwin you were going to elope with, and I'll go to jail if necessary."

He paused for breath, while Helen rose from her chair and protested.

"Impossible, Mr. Gladwin. I"---

"Nothing of the sort," the young man stopped her. "It is perfectly possible, and I only wish that I were the man you had chosen to elope with. I'd elope with you now--in a minute--aunt or no aunt."

"You must not talk that way," cried the young girl, her face aflame. "You are only saying this out of politeness, a sense of chivalry, and while I appreciate all you are doing for me I could not accept any such sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!" he retorted, with increasing ardor. "Call it blessing; call it heavenly boon; call it the pinnacle of my desire, the apogee of my hopes--call it anything in the world but sacrifice."

"Oh, you must not talk to me this way!" exclaimed the girl, sinking back into her chair and covering her face with her hands.

"But I certainly must," the young man reeled on. "It is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It has come upon me like a stroke of lightning--it may not seem reasonable--it may not seem sane. I can't help that. It is here--inside of me"---

"Stop," Helen interposed again, her voice faint and tremulous. "You are taking advantage of my helpless situation. Why, you hardly know me!" she added, with a swift change of tone as if she had made a sudden discovery. Taking her hands from her face she looked up at him through widening eyes misty with tears.

The young man bit his lip and turned his head away.

"Pardon me," he said bitterly, after a moment's pause. "I had not thought of it in that light. It does seem as if I were taking advantage of you." He looked at her steadily a moment until she dropped her eyes.

"Can you think I am that sort of a man?" he asked abruptly and the tenseness of his voice made her glance up at him again.

Helen made another remarkable discovery--that he had fine eyes and a splendid mouth and nose.

"Can you think I am that sort of a man?" he repeated slowly, forcing her to continue to yield her eyes to his earnest regard.

"No, no," Helen returned hastily. "I did not mean it that way--only I cannot quite understand it. You never saw me till a few hours ago, and then--and then I was engaged"---

She paused and shuddered.

"But that was a case of hypnotism," burst out the young man, letting himself go again. "He is a marvelous man. I wish I had half of his strength of will and--and good looks. It is past belief that he is what he is, with all his talents, his appearance and his magnificent courage. If it is in my power the police shall not reach him.

"At first my only object was to save you from the dreadful position of becoming the wife of such a man, and also from the scandal that must have followed if your elopement were discovered and he were arrested. But now I must confess that the man compels my admiration, and that I want to see him free for his own sake."

"And he is still in the house?" said Helen, anxiously.

"Yes, yes, and here comes your aunt. Now, I pray you, let me take the brunt of this storm. I will ask nothing more of you. I am Travers Gladwin and we were to have eloped--do you promise? For here she is."

"Yes," Helen whispered, and then the storm burst.

"So here you are at last, Helen Burton," came the first roll of thunder from the doorway.

It was not as terrifying a rumble as it might have been had not the statuesque and tightly laced Mrs. Burton lost a good deal of breath in coming up the stairs. She came on into the room with tragic step, followed by Whitney Barnes and Sadie, the latter keeping very close to Barnes as if she feared that her cousin would cover her with reproaches for having revealed the secret of the projected elopement.

"Calm yourself, madam; calm yourself," began Travers Gladwin, as he stepped between her and her niece.

"And who are you, pray?" asked the majestic woman, haughtily.

"I am to blame for it all," he cried. "I am Travers Gladwin."

"What! You are Travers Gladwin! You are the wretch who sought to steal off in the dead of night with my niece and ward. You! You!"

Mrs. Burton looked unutterable threats and maledictions. Travers Gladwin could not resist a smile, which he hid by bowing low and stammering:

"I must humbly confess to being myself and plead guilty of the crime of falling passionately in love with your niece. I"---

Helen rose quickly to her feet and confronted her aunt. There was fire in the young girl's eye as she said:

"Aunt Ella, it is all a mistake, this"---

"Now, Helen," Gladwin turned and took the young girl's hand, "please let me explain. You promised."

"She promised what?" flared Mrs. Burton.

"She foolishly promised to elope with me," said Gladwin sweetly, "but when she got here and thought of the shock and grief that her dear aunt might suffer she suddenly changed her mind. I had everything arranged--car waiting, parson waiting, marriage license in my pocket, everything! You see madam, I am the only guilty party. Your niece was the innocent victim of my wiles."

Mrs. Burton looked from one to the other in complete bewilderment. Helen could only blush and look confused. The immensity of Gladwin's lie struck her dumb. Sadie was staring at him in open-mouthed amazement. Even Whitney Barnes blinked his eyes and forgot his handcuffs.

Travers Gladwin met Mrs. Burton's frowning and perplexed stare with a fatuous smile. At last she turned to Whitney Barnes and asked:

"Is he telling the truth?"



"HE'S ALMOST AS MADLY IN LOVE WITH HER AS I AM."

"Oh, yes," said Barnes, readily, "and if it hadn't been for me he might have kidnapped her. He's almost as madly in love with her as I am--you will have to excuse me a moment, I think I see that man Ryan."

The shackled young man suddenly darted out of the room, followed by Sadie, who seemed irresistibly drawn in his wake.

Mrs. Burton looked after them helplessly. A suspicion suddenly flashed in her brain and she turned back to Gladwin.

"I feel sure that you are deceiving me," she charged him, "and that that other young man is Travers Gladwin. You can't tell me that his wrists were not handcuffed, for I just saw them."

"You are entirely mistaken," Gladwin returned soberly. "If you will kindly step out into the music room I will show you a modest portrait of myself that was painted three years ago by an eminent American artist. Helen you will pardon us for just a moment," and he turned with a broad smile that won him a smile in return, for the humor of the situation had gradually beaten down whatever other emotions stirred in the girl's breast.

Like one reluctantly led in a dream, Mrs. Burton allowed Gladwin to escort her into the music room outside and conduct her to a painting that hung in an obscure corner of the room.

"Do you think it flatters me?" he asked, as she regarded it dumbly.

She looked at him curiously and then back at the portrait, then shook her head and muttered:

"There's a mystery here somewhere. You are all banded together in a conspiracy. I do not know whom to believe. But it has gone far enough. We will go back to Omaha to-morrow. I had no idea New York was such a terrible place. Why are all these policemen running about?"

"Mainly in your interest," responded Gladwin quickly, "but if you will consent not to send me to jail I will get them out of the house and keep the unhappy termination of my romance out of the newspapers."

"Of course, it must not get in the newspapers," cried the horrified Mrs. Burton.

"Then, madam, if you will go back to Helen and promise not to be too hard with her I will attend to it."

"Was your father's name Edwin Gladwin?" asked Mrs. Burton, looking at him with a swift change of expression as he led her back to the room he called his den.

"Yes," said the young man, "but if you will excuse me I will endeavor to get rid of all these policemen."

He suddenly darted from her and descended the stairs.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE ESCAPE.

While he had not the slightest notion where the picture expert had managed to conceal himself during his own enforced absence from the scene of the chase, Travers Gladwin was confident that the man was capable of outwitting an army of the sort of man-hunters who were swarming within and without the aristocratic premises.

When he caught sight of Whitney Barnes and Sadie in a tender confab that was just about to frond out into the full foliage of a romantic climax, it was on his tongue to bid them carry their hearts upstairs and string them together in a more secluded spot. They beat him to his own suggestion, and were gone before he could utter a syllable.

He had the great drawing room and picture gallery to himself and was scanning every corner of it when a voice punctuated the silence.

"Ah, Mr. Gladwin!"

The young man turned quickly and saw what he at first mistook for a uniformed constable emerge from the portières that screened the window.

"Well, if it isn't"--he began in gaping surprise.

"Murphy, sorr, only a tighter fit." Wilson stepped through the curtains twirling his club.

"So you are 666 now, eh?" Gladwin blurted. "And Phelan"---

"The gentleman who belongs in this tight-fitting frock? Oh, he's still about."

"And you managed to bribe him?"

"Not exactly that, Mr. Gladwin--say I persuaded him."

"My hat is off to you again," exclaimed the young man, "but don't waste any time. You can get away easily in that uniform--quick, and good luck."

"I never hurry in these cases," returned the thief, with an air of calm indifference. "You see, I have an idea that the Captain and Kearney are waiting for me at the front door, for they made a loud declaration that they were going to search the cellar. I have had similar experiences, my young friend."

"But they won't leave the front door, and they may burst in here at any moment," protested Gladwin.

"But they will leave the front door when I want them to," said the other, softly.

"By jove, you're a wonderful chap!"

"I've got to be to keep out of jail."

"It's a shame that you misdirect your energies and genius," said the young man, earnestly.

"But you must acknowledge that I work hard for what I get."

"Yes, I do."

"And I really love pictures."

"For themselves?"

"H'm, yes--for themselves."

Travers Gladwin stood frowning at the floor for a moment, then looked up quickly.

"See here, then--you've worked mighty hard for my pictures and I'm going to give you a few of the best of them. Here!" And Gladwin stepped over to the corner of the room where the trunk had been dropped and picked up a bundle of canvases.

The picture expert wore a broad grin as the young man came toward him. He waved aside the proffered bundle and said:

"Those are not the best of them. Just a minute."

He reached behind him and pulled down from under his belted coat a similar carefully rolled bundle.

"These are the gems of your collection," he said grimly, offering the slim roll of canvases. "I can't keep them now--you've been too white about this whole thing. I couldn't even accept 'The Blue Boy.'"

Gladwin refused to accept the paintings and the thief laid them down on the table. Stepping closer to the young man, he bent down and said low and earnestly:

"When a man goes wrong, Gladwin, and the going leans against the lines of least resistance, it's easier to keep on going than to stop and switch off into the hard and narrow path. He is always hoping that something will take hold of him and set him right, and that hope usually involves a woman.

"I've been dreaming lately that I wanted something to set me going in the right direction, but it seems that you have beaten me to that, or are on the fair road to do it. The trouble is that I have forgotten how to go about a clean thing cleanly."

"I'm mighty sorry, but"---Gladwin started.

"But you're also mighty glad."

"I shall always remember you, Wilson, and here's my hand on it that I shall always be willing to help you up and out of the--the"---

"The muck!" supplied the thief, accepting Gladwin's hand and gripping it.

"However, we are wasting time and keeping the ladies up till an unconscionable hour. If you will get your little Jap down here without making a noise about it, I can use him and bid you good-night."

Gladwin went warily out into the hallway, reconnoitered the front door and vestibule, then went to the stairway and uttered a short, sharp whistle. Bateato came down as if on winged feet and halted as if turned to stone between the big man in the uniform of Officer 666 and his master.

"Come here," said Wilson, and plucked the Jap by the arm.

Bateato trembled with apprehension.

"Would you like to catch the thief?" the picture expert asked him.

"Ees, sair."

Bateato looked at his master, who nodded reassuringly.

"Well, the thief is in your master's room," said Wilson, impressively. "Go up there and bang on the door--take that poker out of the fireplace and make all the noise you can. Do you understand me?"

"Ees, sair," and Bateato's long lost grin returned. "I make bang, bang."

"Yes, and yell, 'Police--quick, quick, quick--catch thief.'"

"Ees, sair, big much pleece come and tief run. Bateato run too and pleece find all empty."

"Good--hurry!" and Wilson gave the Jap an unnecessary push toward the fireplace, for the little Oriental fairly flew on his errand.

A moment later there burst upon the stillness of the mansion a frightful uproar. The noise was distinctly audible in the street, as Wilson had slipped to the door and opened it, then concealed himself behind a curtain.

It was only a matter of seconds before Captain Stone, Kearney and the entire outside patrol rushed in and piled up the stairs.

Travers Gladwin had not stirred from where he stood in the drawing-room when Bateato got his instructions. He was intensely excited and feared that some slip might spoil this inspired plan.

"Good-by," came a muffled hail from the hallway. Then there was silence both within and without.

"Gad, I hope he makes it!" cried the young man and rushed to the window. He had hardly reached there when the stillness was punctured by a crash of shifting gears and the racket of a sixty horsepower engine thrown into sudden, furious action.

"He's gone!" Gladwin breathed, as he saw a touring car hurl itself athwart his vision. He

recognized his former servant, Watkins, at the wheel.

CHAPTER XLII.

MICHAEL PHELAN'S PREDICAMENT.

It was as if a great burden had been removed from his shoulders. Leaving the window and stepping back into the room, Travers Gladwin stretched his arms above his head and exhaled a long breath of satisfaction.

"Now I can sit down and await developments," he said to himself, slipping into a chair and stretching out his legs, "and it will only remain for Michael Phelan to turn up or to fail to turn up and the mystery of the escape is explained. Poor Phelan, he must be a terrific simpleton, and I suppose I am partly to bla"---

His gaze had wandered to the great chest, the lid of which was distinctly rising.

Before Gladwin could jump to his feet the lid was thrown back and there sat the subject of his soliloquy in his shirt sleeves, jerking his head about like a jack-in-the-box.

"Where in blazes am I?" he groaned as his eyes made out Travers Gladwin.

"You seem to be in the chest," replied the young man, covering his mouth with his hand.

"Howly murther! me uniform is gone again!" exploded Phelan, struggling to his feet and examining his shirt sleeves as if he feared he were the victim of witchcraft.

He climbed out of the chest and turned a vindictive glance upon Gladwin, who composed his features and said:

"Not guilty this time, Officer."

Phelan stared at him stupidly for a second and then let his arms and shoulders go limp. He was a lugubriously pathetic figure as he turned up his eyes and muttered:

"Now, I remember--they took it off me and drugged me an' rammed me into the chest. Wurra! Wurra! I'm a goner now for shure."

Gladwin was about to speak when there was a run of feet on the stairs and in burst Captain Stone and Detective Kearney. At the sight of Phelan, the captain recoiled and his jaw dropped. Kearney likewise regarded him in blank astonishment.

"Where's your uniform, Phelan?" roared Captain Stone when he could get his breath.

"They took it off me--drugged me an' half murdered me--eight of 'em," whined Phelan.

"Eight of 'em!" yelled the captain. "There was only one of them, you numskull."

"I hope to croak if there wasn't two of 'em with the stren'th of eight," rejoined Phelan, wiping his dripping forehead and rolling his eyes. "An' they chloroformed me an' stuffed me into the chest. You can ask Mr. Gladwin."

"If you let that thief escape in your uniform, Mike Phelan," stormed the infuriated captain, "I'll break you to-morrow. And as for you, Mr. Gladwin, if you had a hand in this"---

"Calm yourself, captain," returned the young man, "I am unable to claim the honor. I just happened in here as Mr. Phelan was coming out of the chest."

"Why did that Jap make such a thundering racket upstairs?" broke in Kearney. "The whole thing looks to me like a frame-up."

Travers Gladwin shrugged his shoulders and said easily:

"Considering the number of policemen on the job, does it not also take on the aspect of a slip-up? It would make rather amusing reading in the newspapers, but if you prefer, gentlemen, we can let the matter drop right here."

Captain Stone and Kearney looked at each other and found no comfort in each other's countenances.

"Even though he got away with one hundred thousand dollars' worth of my paintings, slipping out from under your very noses," Gladwin pressed his advantage, "I may, for the sake of avoiding notoriety, decide that it is best to keep the thing quiet. Of course, it is in your power to compel publicity."

"Not against your wishes, sir," said Captain Stone, meekly.

"And you, Mr. Kearney," smiled the young man, looking up into the frowning visage of the much advertised Central Office man.

"Captain Stone is my superior officer," said Kearney shortly, through compressed lips.

"Very well, then, Captain," Gladwin ran on, "we will just drop the incident from our minds. You

will oblige me by calling off your men at once."

Captain Stone bowed and left the room, followed by Kearney.

"Well, Phelan," said Gladwin, turning to that distressed individual, "the evening's entertainment seems at an end."

"'Tis a divvil of an intertainment fer me--I'll be broke to-morrer."

"Oh, no, Phelan," and the young man walked over and patted him on the shoulder, "not broke--you'll resign."

"A swell chance I've got to resign--with no shield to turn in. It'll break the heart of me poor ould mother."

There were tears in Michael Phelan's voice and his woe-begone expression was pitiable. Young Gladwin hastened to cheer him up.

"I will take it upon myself to see that you are honorably discharged, Phelan. I can almost swear that a little note to Captain Stone with an inclosure of say four figures will put through your resignation."

"But I'll be out of a job, won't I?" flared Phelan.

"Not for a minute. I am going to give you a job for life."

"What?"

"Yes, and at twice the salary you were getting. I'm going to appoint you my private watchman to guard my picture gallery."

"Sure, an' this ain't one o' your jokes?" Phelan asked, with a dismal effort to summon a grin.

"Indeed, it is not, and here is that five hundred dollar bill you so foolishly surrendered to my friend the picture expert. Now, as all your fellow officers seem to have departed you can begin your duties by going upstairs and telling the ladies that the blockade has been raised."

By the time Michael Phelan got the crisp saffron bill tucked away in his jeans he was in full and glorious grin and made for the stairway with an agility that was a distinct revelation of hidden resources. A few minutes later Mrs. Burton entered the room, followed by her two nieces.

As her now calmer eye took in the room and the empty picture frames, Mrs. Burton exclaimed:

"Whatever have you been doing here?"

"Some of my canvases need cleaning," was the ready response, with a wink at Whitney Barnes, who was hovering about Sadie, "so I took the most valuable ones out of the frames to send them to the cleaners."

Mrs. Burton swallowed the fib and began a tour of inspection of the room.

"Your father collected some of these, didn't he?" she said after a pause. "Your father and my father were very good friends. I remember not so long ago hearing him tell of that portrait of your ancestor," indicating the Stuart.

"Now I like this one--a Gainsborough, isn't it?" She had stopped in front of "The Blue Boy."

"Do you like that one?" cried the young man.

"It's charming," gushed Mrs. Burton.

"It's yours."

"Mine! Why, I couldn't think of it."

"Please do me the honor of accepting it."

"After what has occurred to-night? Why, I"---Mrs. Burton couldn't take her eyes from the picture, and seemed thrilled with an ecstasy of admiration.

"I will have it packed and shipped to you to-morrow."

Mrs. Burton wheeled upon him with an expression that fairly took him to her arms.

"You dear, generous boy," she cried; "if Helen had only confided in me--here is my card; come to me to-morrow and we will have a family conference. I"---

"Auntie," interposed Helen in alarm.

"I will take charge of all the wedding arrangements," ran on Auntie, fairly bubbling over. "Come early in the afternoon, Mr. Gladwin. I must get my girls to bed. Good night--come, girls."

Mrs. Burton started for the door and Helen lingered behind.

"Oh, whatever shall I do?" she whispered to Gladwin.

"Whatever your heart dictates," he whispered in reply.

"And did he escape?" came the frightened query, as she dropped her eyes and blushed.

"Yes, and they will never get him."

"Thank you!" She gave him her hand for a moment and was gone.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CIRCUMVENTION OF AUNTIE.

Sadie sat up with a start and rubbed her eyes.

"All right, Nanette," she said sleepily. "I'm awake."

The trim, rosy-cheeked maid smiled and swiftly left the room.

She had deposited one armful of fluffy things on a chair beside Sadie's bed and another armful of fluffy things on a chair beside Helen's bed. She had also performed other mysterious little offices noiselessly before going to the side of Sadie's bed.

"And sleeping like an innocent babe," said the comely Nanette to herself with a depth of affection in her tone. Then she bent down and called in Sadie's ear:

"Ten o'clock, Miss Sadie."

She had to repeat the whispered call several times before Sadie's eyelids fluttered and she stirred into life. The maid had vanished by the time the younger of the two sleeping beauties had removed the cobwebs from her eyes.

The twin rosewood beds lay side by side enveloped by the transparent silken hangings of a single canopy. The room was exquisitely done in pink and everywhere were evidences that the two lucky mortals who slumbered therein were coddled and pampered to the limit of modern luxury.

Sadie's robe de nuit, as the fashion magazines put it, was a creation of laces and ribbons and mighty becoming. She had admitted this to herself as she surveyed her reflection in the tall oval mirror only five hours before. She admitted it again as she hopped out of bed and confronted herself in the same mirror. Then she turned and ran quickly to the side of Helen's bed.

She bent down and kissed her cousin.

"Get up, Helen," Sadie urged, as the blue eyes reluctantly opened. "Get up and dress, dear--we haven't much time."

"Much time for what?" asked Helen, sitting up and going through the ceremony of rubbing her eyes.

"Much time before Auntie wakes."

A roseate blush spread up from the ribbons at Sadie's throat to the roots of her fair hair.

Helen's eyes were wide open now and she looked at her cousin in frowning puzzlement.

"And Mr. Hogg is expected," said Sadie, with swift inspiration.

"Whatever are you driving at?" asked Helen.

"Are you anxious to greet Mr. Hogg?" pouted Sadie.

"No," was the vehement response.

"Then we must be out when he comes--and I have an important engagement at eleven."

Helen shot two little pink feet out of the covers and planked them down on the velvety rug.

"Whom have you an engagement with, Sadie Burton?" she asked, with breathless eagerness.

"I have an engagement to elope!"

This time Sadie turned her head to hide her blushes.

Helen seemed actually paralyzed. There was an intense pause before Sadie wheeled round, flung her head defiantly and said with more fire than she had ever in her life displayed:

"With Mr. Whitney Barnes--and you are going to assist me--you and Mr. Gladwin."

"You--cannot--be--serious, Sadie?" said the older cousin, slowly.

"I am, though!" was the passionate rejoinder. "Nanette and I packed my steamer trunk after you and Auntie went to bed. Hurry now, Helen, dear, for we must be at the Little Church Around the Corner at eleven o'clock. I am going to wear my gray travelling dress and you your brown."

"Why, you dreadful little minx, you!" cried Helen. "If you are poking fun at me I will never forgive you."

"I am not poking fun," retorted Sadie with the same ardor and almost in tears. "It is all planned and arranged. Whitney promised to have everything ready at the church, including Travers Gladwin. He said he couldn't wait another minute after eleven o'clock--that the suspense would kill him--and he was so terribly in earnest about it that I believe him."

"You goose!" exclaimed Helen, but now she was smiling and there was a happy light in her eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me, Sadie Burton," she added, "that you fell in love with that young man in a few hours--*you*, the man-hater!"

"Y-y-yes," admitted Sadie, her cheeks again on fire.

"And a man you don't know anything about--a perfect stranger!"

This brought the fire into the timid miss's eyes and she returned warmly:

"I know everything about him, Helen Burton--his whole family history, and he is only obeying orders in rushing the ceremony."

"Obeying orders?"

"Yes, his father commanded him to marry me at once--and if he doesn't obey he will be disinherited and have to become a plumber or something to make a living. His father is Joshua Barnes, the mustard king--you must have heard of him. When I told Auntie who he was she almost collapsed and said something about Joshua Barnes buying and selling twenty hogs--I suppose she meant Jabez Hogg."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing, Sadie. Mr. Barnes could not have been serious. His father never saw you in his life."

"Oh, but he telephoned his father all about it before he proposed to me. He was sure I would say yes. He is a wonderful mind-reader and believes in mysteries and Fate. He said the minute he saw me he knew I was his Fate."

Once more the modest Sadie was in a state bordering on conflagration. Helen's eye sobered as she looked at and beyond Sadie.

"That was the very thing Travers Gladwin--I mean the real one--said to me," she mused.

"He did!"

"Yes, and the way things have turned out it would seem"---

Helen stopped and covered her face with her hands. Sadie ran to her and put her arms about her.

"You are going to help us, aren't you, Helen dear?" said Sadie, tremulously. "I would tell Auntie about it only she would want a tremendous wedding and all that. Whitney and I both hate big weddings. I am too timid and he is too nervous--says he might swallow the ring and choke to death. You will now, Helen darling?"

There was a little sob in Sadie's voice and Helen surrendered.

"You are doing a very rash thing, Sadie," Helen lectured, striving to draw her brows into an expression of impressive solemnity. "My own terrible experience should have been a lesson to you--a warning--a"---

"But it was Whitney Barnes who saved you, Helen!" cried Sadie, exultantly. "You owe it all to him and that is why I began to love him!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Helen sharply. "Mr. Barnes had nothing whatever to do with it. All he did was to get himself handcuffed and run about absurdly trying to be unlocked."

"But he was on watch and planned and planned," Sadie defended her hero.

"Sadie Burton, I say that Whitney Barnes had nothing whatever to do with it. He was merely an instrument. Travers Gladwin did it all. I owe everything to him--*everything!* He would have gone to jail for me, sacrificed all his wonderful paintings--oh, Sadie, it was wonderful of him!"

It was Sadie who was thunderstruck now by the ardor in her cousin's voice. Her amazement soon gave way to a beaming smile, and she mumbled as she turned to her dressing table, "I do believe she is in love with him."

CHAPTER XLIV.

MISS FEATHERINGTON'S SHATTERED DREAM.

Marietta Featherington couldn't seem to concentrate her mind upon that thirteenth chapter of "Lily the Lovely Laundress." The handsome rat-catcher had just beaten the aristocratic villain to a pulp and would have finished the job neatly and thoroughly had not Lily raised her lovely fair hand and cried with the imperiousness of an empress:

"Pause, Giovanni! Pause! He may have a mother!"

Ordinarily Miss Featherington would have raced through the pages hungrily, avidly. Not so on this fair November afternoon. Whether it was the mince pie and melted cheese she had partaken of a bare hour before, or whether it was the even-more-so-than-usual grumpy mood of her employer, Joshua Barnes, she could not tell. Perhaps it was neither. She refused to analyze it. Whatever the cause, she felt heavy and wistful and sad.

From time to time the emotional Miss Featherington allowed Whitney Barnes to flit through the

corridors of her imagination. He had walked heavily through her dreams the night before. His strange words of yesterday had strangely moved her. Desperately she had striven to solve the mystery. Were they words of love? If so, how would Old Grim Barnes accept the declaration from his son's lips that he loved the humble though, yes, though beautiful stenographer lady of the Barnes Mustard Company, Limited?

Miss Featherington had half expected to walk into Joshua Barnes's presence that morning and meet with a torrent of abuse. She had rehearsed a cold and haughty retort. But her employer had greeted her with a gruff, "Good-morning," and an expression that was equivalent to a smile.

Alas! the prince had not spoken.

Marietta pounded out forty-two letters containing references to as many different kinds of assorted and selected mustard before she succeeded in dismissing the heir to the mustard millions from her romantic thoughts and creating a new hero in his stead. The new hero some way fell down and she picked up "Lily the Lovely Laundress." But even the "Lovely Lily" failed to thrill and she laid the book aside.

A long sigh was escaping from the depressed maiden's bosom when the door of the anteroom opened and who should enter but Whitney Barnes. Marietta swallowed her sigh and clasped her hand over her palpitating heart.

The young man was not alone, however, and he did not deign Miss Featherington a glance as he held the door open and cried:

"Come in, children!"

The children were none other than Helen and Sadie and Travers Gladwin. Nor did they deign Miss Featherington a glance as they assembled in a little group, talking in hushed tones and punctuating their talk with suppressed laughter.

By the time Whitney Barnes did turn to Marietta that young lady's nose was elevated to an excruciating angle--so much so that she was unable to fulfill her desire to sniff. There was cold hauteur in her stare as she met the smile of Whitney Barnes and replied to his query:

"Yes, Mr. Barnes, your father is in and alone."

"Thank you, Miss Featherington," cried the young man, gaily, and an instant later the little party of four had vanished behind a mahogany portal.

Joshua Barnes was bent over his desk writing, as the door opened noiselessly and the four young people entered. When he looked up his son, Travers Gladwin and Helen were lined up beside his chair, the two young men smiling sheepishly and the girls blushing crimson and looking down at the floor.

"Hello, Pater," opened Whitney Barnes, "you remember Travers Gladwin. This is Mrs. Gladwin, a bride of sixty-seven minutes!"

Old Grim Barnes was on his feet in an instant with a gallant bow to Helen and a hearty handshake for the bridegroom.

For a second or two he failed to descry Sadie, who, as per rehearsal, was hidden behind the two young men. As, with a look of surprise, he spied her, Helen drew Sadie to her and managed to stammer:

"And this is my cousin Sadie, Mr. Barnes."

Sadie dropped a timid courtesy, her face on fire.

"How do you do, Miss--er"---

Joshua Barnes was feasting his eyes on Sadie's shy beauty and smiling benignly.

"I didn't catch the name," he added, turning to Helen.

"B-b-b," she began, when Whitney Barnes came to her rescue.

"Barnes, pater--Mrs. Sadie; that is, Mrs. Whitney Barnes--a bride of seventy-seven minutes."

Whitney Barnes beamed upon his father and put his arm about the old gentleman's shoulders to support him.

"How do you like my choice, dad?--isn't she a darling? Why don't you ask to kiss the bride?"

Joshua Barnes breathed with difficulty for a moment and his eyes blinked. Slowly he looked for confirmation in the faces of the newlywed Gladwins, and when they both nodded and smiled, he returned his glance to Sadie, who had turned very pale and was beginning to tremble.

The mustard king shook off his son's arm and gathered Sadie to him with a bear hug.

He kissed her ten times in succession and then let her down in his chair and patted her shoulder. Joshua Barnes was so happy that tears glistened in his eyes. He continued to look at Sadie for a long moment before he turned to his son and gulped:

"Whitney Barnes, you scoundrel--have you been keeping this from me?"

"Why no, dad," came the laughing answer. "I telephoned you about it last night, and you called me"---

"For the first time in my life I made a mistake, Whitney Barnes," his father checked him, "and you both have my blessing a thousandfold--provided you will take me in as a boarder."

“Done!” exclaimed Whitney Barnes.

THE END

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