CHAPTER XXVIII

THE day was pricked with little perplexities.

Babe Wolfe awoke late in the afternoon. The room was dark and cold. Despite all the bedclothes that covered her, Babe shivered.

"Dearie!" she called, "get up and close the window, you lazy thing! And I wish I had a hot-water bottle for my feet!"

She turned, watching the stiff curtains that reached out toward her from the window, crackling. She waited for Molly to stir and answer. She remembered finally that she was alone, and swore. She wrapped the bedclothing about her, and worked at the window —using only one hand because the other hand must hold the blankets and the quilt in place—and when the window was closed she scampered into the kitchen and lit the oven.

When she had dressed and had started the coffee she called up Mr. Blum.

"Listen, boy friend," she said. "Dearie hasn't showed up, and I'm getting the heeby-jeebies. Honest I could bite my nails like Carozzo—only he ain't got none left to bite. I'm worried. See if you can get

a hold of that guy Morehouse. Maybe he knows where Dearie is. Maybe he kidnapped her. If he didn't—— And make it snappy, will you?

She took in the milk and the papers, and read as she breakfasted. Molly's picture was in nearly every one of the papers—and there were columns and columns of type narrating the events that had occurred that morning. Babe cut out pictures and stories with her nail file. Great publicity for Dearie, she thought—but if Dearie had disappeared? Good-night!

Some of the stories hinted that the fight had been arranged to give the thief a chance to take Molly's rubies undetected and escape. Some of them declared there was some connection between the throwing of the spindle and the Larkin murder. "Mystery surrounded" everything, even in the newspapers that handled the yarn facetiously.

Babe looked in vain for any story or comment under the names of Henschell or Retticker. She was disappointed. She thought for a moment that these two reporters had slighted her roommate. But her other favourites were well represented.

Wallace Sullivan in the *Telegraph* called Ted "the unknown socker."

He played a peculiar game [Sullivan said]. Having batted Pio Mora for a neat safety he caught Carozzo on the fly and threw him out at the plate. It happened to be a plate of hot spaghetti, but Carozzo didn't mind. He didn't know it. After this the happy warrior turned

umpire, and the crowd had a nice time throwing bottles at him.

Walter Winchell of the *Graphic* headed his column with a bit of doggerel:

Rubies are red;
Carozzo is blue.
Who stole the necklace
From Eileen Drew?

And his last line was written for the sophisticates—

What beautiful cabaret yodeller has displaced which torso tosser in whose (roof garden prop) affections?

Mark Hellinger of the *News* dwelt more on the fight than he did on the theft of the rubies. It might be news, he said, when a Broadway blonde had her tonsils or her jewels removed. But when a boob went into a sucker club and knocked the host for a row of cover charges instead of being thrown down the elevator shaft—that was real news.

Hellinger had one line that made Babe laugh—

They poured liquor down Carozzo's throat, but he didn't give a dram.

"That guy Hellinger," she said aloud, "never pulls his punches; but he always pulls his puns."

It was more than an hour before she heard from Mr. Blum.

"Morehouse has checked out of his hotel," he re-

ported. "And guess who paid his bill and took his luggage out."

"The sheriff!"

"Wrong. Geoffrey Cameron Platt!"

"I was gonna say! Listen, boy friend, I'm more scared than ever. Dust up here right away, and bring me the late editions. And if you see any reporters hanging around keep the trap shut. If they find out that Morehouse has disappeared—and Dearie, too—wuff, wuff!"

But Molly had not disappeared. She had gone to Ossining, determined to see her father, or at least to send him a note of explanation. She knew what he would think when he saw her picture in the papers. And she knew he would see it.

The train stopped at every station. Sometimes it stopped between stations. Once Molly feared she was snowbound. The snow fell thickly, evenly, constantly, and rain fell now and then with the snow, making a weird world. The prison was a white cake, the icing dripping over its sides. Little white figures of men were stuck on the frosting, candy figures with candy rifles.

She sat in the warden's office for a long time, quiet, unmoving, before anyone appeared. Then an old man in convict uniform entered, a thin man who looked at her as though he hated the sight of her.

"I saw your picture in the newspapers this morn-

ing," he said. It was an indictment, the way he said it.

"Yes? I came to see my father, Anthony Sommers."

He glared at her.

"He's not here," he said.

She knew he had said it because she heard it. But she had not seen his lips move.

"Escaped?" she asked.

The old man winked at her, looked all around quickly, and whispered: "Ask Geoffrey Platt—Geoffrey Cameron Platt."

He darted out through a door. Molly waited until she had seen the warden. She asked for her father.

"Sorry," the latter said, "you can't see him."

"He's still here?"

"Of course he is."

Molly told him of the convict. He laughed at her.

"Some of these stir rats get crazy ideas," he said, but Molly felt that he was uneasy, and she determined to find Platt and make him tell her why she could not see her father. She was sure now that he knew.

Nor had Ted vanished. He awoke in Geoffrey Platt's suite in the Allegheny. He was dressed in his own pajamas. His toilet articles, his watch, his keys, and his money were on the dresser. His evening clothes lay on a couch near the bed. A sombre young man, who proved to be Platt's secretary and valet, informed Ted where he was.

"Mr. Platt thought it might be convenient for you to stay here for a little while," he said. "He feared the police might be looking for you; but he called up a few minutes ago to say that everything was all right, and you might leave as soon as you wished."

The man was polite, but in spite of his politeness Ted realized he was inviting him to hasten his departure. He bathed, thinking of Molly's face as he had seen it last night when she bent over the stricken Corazzo. Wondering where she was. He determined to find her and take her back to Sommerville. He dressed quickly. His watch showed 11:23.

"Is it morning?" he asked.

"Almost," said the young man.

Ted went to the window and looked out. He stepped back quickly, frightened.

"I must get out of here," he cried, trying to quell the panic he felt at the realization that he was so high above the earth. "Tell Mr. Platt I'll come back to thank him—as soon as I can. Or—or I'll call him up and have him send my things to the McAlpin."

He hurried out into the corridor, and just as he stepped into the elevator he saw a man entering the door of Platt's suite. It was Anthony Sommers.

Ted was so amazed he forgot to be frightened as the car plunged down the shaft to the lobby.

"Platt wanted me to get out of there before Sommers came," Ted thought. "But why is Sommers not in jail?"

CHAPTER XXIX

IT WAS nearly midnight when Ted arrived at Molly's apartment in Seventy-second Street. He found Mr. Blum there. Mr. Blum was alone. He had been waiting all evening.

"I was just going to give you up," he greeted Ted. "I was going to quit this joint at twelve sharp and go to the Corsairs'. I looked at my watch. It was eleven-fifty-five. 'I'll give him five minutes more,' I said to myself, I said; and I hadn't hardly shoved my ticker back in my pocket when I heard you coming up the steps."

"Where's Molly?" Ted demanded.

"Yes, sir, I was just going to give you up," Mr. Blum went on. He did not look at Ted.

"Where is she?" he asked again.

"Babe says for me to stay here. She had a hunch that you'd either come or 'phone. Molly ain't showed up, and Babe's wild. She's—well, she don't know what to think."

He sketched out for Ted the things that had happened in Carozzo's bedroom after the fight.

"Babe waited in the dressing room an hour and a half," he finished, "but Dearie, she was still in Carozzo's room. Babe knocked on the bedroom door

and Dearie answered. She said for Babe not to wait—and—and, well, we don't know what to think."

"They were alone!" Ted said. "But—but Carozzo was——"

"You beat him up pretty bad. But he's O.K. now, Babe says—and after to-night's show——"

"God!" Ted staggered toward the door. "I'll kill that man," he said. "I'll kill him!"

The elevator men in the lobby of the Allegheny later declared that Ted had "come rushing in like a streak," and "like an engine runnin' wild with a full head of steam on."

He had tried to get into the elevator that ran to the roof, and one of Carozzo's roughnecks had tapped him on the back of the head with a blackjack. Ted fell, and almost before he realized it he was being led out of the building by a policeman.

"Easy does it," the policeman was saying. He had a queer hold on the sleeve of Ted's coat. Ted could easily have broken that hold, and probably would have done so had not the holder worn the uniform of the police. Ted had a profound respect for the law. Even without that hold, he knew the policeman could have taken him easily.

He was under arrest! He was helpless, going away from the girl he loved, the girl who needed him so.

"Officer," he begged, "please let me go. I must get up to the Corsairs'. I must! It's—it's a matter of life and death to me."

He stopped, but the policeman dragged him on with that gentle hold.

"You can tell it to the lieutenant at the station house, me lad," he said. "If he wants to let you go, 'tis all right with me. But don't try fightin' with that gang again. 'Tis no chance you have."

They were walking up Broadway, away from the Allegheny Building, away from Molly. Oh, if he had only not lost his head! If he had only gone up some other elevator, to Platt's room, he could have walked up the stairs to the roof. But he hadn't thought of that in time.

Disconsolately he walked on. He would tell the lieutenant at the station house how much he loved Molly, would describe to him the danger she faced. Maybe the lieutenant would let him go back to the Allegheny. Maybe those men would let him go up to the roof. He had plenty of money. If they wouldn't be bribed—or if they wouldn't let him go up to Platt's room—— He shoved his free hand in his pocket.

It closed on the butt of a revolver!

"Framed!" he thought. "One of those men put that gun there—so it would be found on me. How many years in jail can they give me for that?"

Carozzo was not only making love to Molly, but he was trying to frame the only man who could save her from him! Ted saw the plot now. Carozzo knew he would come back. He had baited a trap for him, and Ted had walked into it. He had rushed into it—and

here he was, going to jail. And Molly? How many years before he would see her again?

He jerked his arm free. He tripped the policeman. He ran toward the Allegheny Building. He heard a shot. He darted into the building across the street from the Allegheny. He recognized it as the building Mr. Blum was "running up." He remembered Mr. Blum's saying something about a bridge between this building and the Allegheny roof.

He wouldn't have to go up in the Allegheny elevator at all. He would go up this one, and cross over on the bridge. He would walk up all the steps in the world if he had to, cross all the bridges there were, no matter how high they were. Heights? What were heights now?

A man stopped him, an old man. The watchman, Ted realized. Ted eluded him, passed him, found a stairway, and started up. His head ached from the blow of the billy, but he didn't mind. He felt strong. He felt a fierce gladness. He would climb. He had a gun. Thank God he had a gun; and he would use it to kill Carozzo.

Some few flights below him the policeman, Officer Patrick Kelly, was talking to the watchman.

"Did a big guy come in here a minute ago?" he asked.

"Did he? The wind of him near knocked me over. He went up the steps."

Kelly groaned.

"How many floors up must I chase that blitherin billy goat?" he asked.

"She's sixty-one stories now," the watchman said, with not a little pride. "Going to be eighty 'fore she's done. Tallest in the world."

"Is there an elevator?"

"An elevator? Tush! Tush! How could they put in elevators when the shafts ain't done yet? They's steps up nineteen floors, and mind you don't break your shins on them. And then it's ladders all the rest of the way. It's worth your life to go up there a night like this. What's the poor felly done? Murder?"

"Murder? Sure he must be wanted for murder in some jerk-water town to run from me like that—taking chances with a bullet. Sure I thought it was only a drunk and disorderly it was, and a matter of putting up a cash bail with the lieutenant, and a few minutes' polite conversation with the boys in the back room, and I'm taking him easy when what does he do but clip me one alongside the ear and skedaddle like a blitherin' goat?"

"Leave him alone, Pat, and he'll freeze to death up there, if he doesn't fall and break his neck."

"Leave him trip me up and get away, is it? Out of me path, O'Leary. There never was a Kelly yet afraid of any skyscraper in the world. And, if you get a chance, drop a word to the sergeant so he won't be worried about me health."

CHAPTER XXX

TED MOREHOUSE stopped climbing only when he came to the top of the stairs. He stepped onto a cement floor, and saw about him nothing but great steel girders. He could look up through them, far up. White girders, they were, rimed with snow and sleet.

The wind shrieked at him, jeered at him, taunted him; and he knew he was afraid. He was afraid, but he was going up, up to the top and across the bridge.

He stumbled over a plank half buried in the snow. He fell against a girder, but he was up again in a moment. He had found the ladder to the twentieth floor. He was climbing it. It wasn't so hard—at first.

The lashing of the wind tore tears out of his eyes, tears that began to freeze as they trickled down his cheeks. His gloves were wet. His coat grew heavier and heavier, but he went up, and up, and up. The ladders shook, and the lights far down below winked maliciously; but Ted's hands caught the rungs of the ladders, one after the other, clung to them tightly, pulled up his body. Right hand, right foot, left hand, left foot, up, up, up!

Every little distance up he found a boarded-over floor where he could rest for a moment, and wipe the

frozen tears off his face and dig the snow out of his ears. The planks threatened to give way beneath him. They sagged with his weight. They were uneven, and sometimes tripped him. But they were planks, substantial. He could sit on them, and hold onto a girder, and breathe deep, and take courage and strength for the new spurt.

And as steadily as Ted climbed, Kelly climbed. He came easily, going more quickly up the ladders, but taking longer periods of rest. His hands gripped not the rungs of the ladders but the sides. And he kept talking to himself.

"Imagine me romping all over a skyscraper in the dead of night—me that should be down on me quiet beat, or home in me nice warm bed. Gettin' me hands all cut and me shins all barked—and maybe pneumony in the bargain. If I wasn't a Kelly I'd let him climb straight up to hell itself."

Ted shed his coat when he reached the planks that marked the forty-eighth floor. It was too heavy. It was dragging him down, he felt, it was hindering the movement of his legs. He threw it down, watched the wind catch it and bear it away.

The coat sailed out and down, sailed in and down, fell on the policeman, covered him, almost unnerved him.

"Mother of God!" he said. "'Tis a ghost!" He fought it with one hand, until he realized it was only a coat.

"Might as well throw me off as scare me to death," he said. "Ah, wait 'til I get me hands on that one." And he went up a little faster than he had before—which only meant that he had to rest a little longer.

A few floors more and Ted threw away his wet, torn gloves, and tore away his collar so he could breathe. He was more confident now. He believed he had conquered his fear. He felt himself strong enough to climb all the rest of the night if he had to.

The work of climbing generated heat in him that combated the cold of the wind and the snow, except in his hands and his feet. His hands were growing numb. His feet seemed turning to ice. He didn't mind so much now the swaying of the ladders, nor the lights so far beneath him. The ladders were lashed securely to the top and bottom girders, lashed with heavy rope. They swayed, but they couldn't come loose. So long as one had something to hold on to, Ted told himself, one had nothing to fear. Your icy feet would slip on the icy rungs, but your bare hands would hold on, keep holding on. You couldn't fall, you need not fear. Up, up, up!

So he came to the ladder that had broken away from the rope that had held it to the bottom girder. So he came to the greatest peril of his life, and the cruelest test of his manhood.

It was between the fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh stories, this ladder, this loose ladder that he must

climb, this ladder that swung like a frightful pendulum between heaven and earth. It swung out over the street. It swung back, banging against the steel work. It swung out again with the next contrary wind, out and up to bang against the girder above.

The sight almost unmanned Ted. He felt sick. He felt that the building itself was swinging like that crazy wild ladder. He wrapped both arms about the nearest upright, and he wanted to scream with fear.

He could not go up save by that ladder; and he must go up; he must!

He watched it for a long time, ashamed, desperate; and then he stood erect and lifted his face up to the storming heavens and cried aloud:

"I'm a God-damned coward, but I'm going up!"

He caught the ladder and held it, fighting the wind that would tear it out of his hands, held it, mounted it, started to climb it. The wind pounced on him merrily, swung him out—over the street. He looked down. His foot slipped. He thought he was going to fall into that terrible abyss. He closed his eyes, held his breath, clung to the rungs until his fingers hurt. If the rope holding this frail bit of wood to the top girder should fray—if his hands should slip——

The ladder swung back. He went up another rung, another, another—and now that he knew the wind couldn't swing him out over the street again he felt suddenly weak and limp—and happy.

"I'm all right now—Molly," he said. "The wind is blowing me to you this time"—and he laughed, and climbed to the top—the boarded-over floor that was a story higher than the Allegheny roof—and lay there panting, done with fear forever.