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CHAPTER XVI.

MR. BARNES ON THE SCENE.

As soon as it was settled beyond all doubt that the clothes and locket found under the dam were the ones on which the fate of Walter Marvel depended Mr. Barnes was all activity again.

"Now," said he, speaking rapidly, "there is not a moment to lose. We have saved the innocent, but we must yet find the guilty, and he has a week the stock of us. How soon can I get away from this town?"

"A train passes Lee Depot at 1 o'clock. You have three-quarters of an hour in which to catch it. My horse and wagon are at your disposal, of course."

"Thank you, Mr. Everly. You must drive me to the station. Before I go I will give you some instructions, though, on the whole, all I wish is that you two will not tell any one of what we have found until you hear from me again."

"But while you are gone must Walter remain in prison?" asked Virginia.

"Yes! It will not hurt him. Neither of you must go to him, for if you do you might betray what I wish kept secret. Do you promise?"

"But may I not tell Alice that her brother is safe? She is desperately ill, and I fear that she may lose her reason if she does not soon hear that there is no danger threatening Walter."

Mr. Barnes considered a moment and then said:

"If you find it necessary, you may tell her that your uncle, Mr. Lewis, is not dead."

"Not dead!" exclaimed his two auditors in a breath.

"Yes, tell her that he is not dead. That will certainly relieve her mind."

"But how can I explain that when she knows to the contrary?"

"You must exercise your ingenuity. Tell her that there has been a mistake as to the identity of the corpse, or anything that occurs to your mind, only do not tell her about the finding of this bundle. I do not wish Mr. Burrows to know what I have done, for fear that he may make trouble for me and perhaps defeat the ends of justice. Now I must be off. Use your judgment, and, above all things, whatever you do tell your sick friend, keep it from getting out. Goodby! Trust me!"

Mr. Barnes was fortunate in finding time to meet him as he pursued his way to New York by a circuitous route. The one which he boarded at Lee took him as far as Worcester and thence he went on to Albany, knowing that from that point he could easily reach New York. As it was, he arrived in that city before noon on the following day. Leaving the train he hurriedly proceeded up town to Washington Heights. Consulting his memorandum book, he turned a few pages, then paused at one which contained the following address:

"John Lewis, Esq. Care T. Jamison, Washington Heights, N. Y."

This he had obtained from Burrows, to whom, it will be remembered, had been shown three letters by John Lewis, who claimed that they had been written to him by his father while he was at school. Mr. Barnes made inquiries and very readily found that Mr. Jamison kept a large boarding school for boys and that he had done so for the last 20 years. Receiving the correct address, he at once proceeded to the schoolhouse and was soon in the presence of a pleasant old man.

"Good morning, Mr. Jamison," began Mr. Barnes. "I am looking for a man who has recently inherited some property, but he cannot be found. He is supposed to be dead and probably is. The case therefore stands thus: If he had a son, that son would inherit, but if not the property goes elsewhere. I have heard that he did have a son, who was for some time at your school, and so I have ventured to trouble you, hoping that you might be able to assist me."

"I am at your service, and if you will give me the name I will look over my books and see what I can find."

"The name is John Lewis, and it is about 14 or 15 years since the lad was supposed to be here. Moreover, it may help you to remember him if I tell you that it is further supposed that he ran away from school and went to sea."

"I am afraid you have been misinformed," said the schoolmaster, shaking his venerable head. "Nothing of that kind ever occurred here. I do not recall such a name of a pupil, but I knew a man of that name once and have good reason to remember him."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Certainly. Now let me see. It must have been about the very time that you mention, though I could give you the exact date, a gentleman called here and wished to see the school. He said that he had a son whom he wished to place in a military institution such as this. His name was Lewis. After I had explained our methods to him he went away, promising to call again. This he did, and on his second visit he told me that his son had refused to go to a military academy, and that he had placed him elsewhere. However, he seemed very much interested in the school and made several suggestions as to improvements. When I explained to him that there were no funds for any such purpose, he generously offered to pay any bills that might be incurred. I protest at first, but he persisted. He even came here himself to superintend the alterations."

"You say that he lived here a short time?"

"Yes, about a month."

"Can you tell me whether his mail was received here?"

"Oh, yes. He was a stranger in the city and had no other address while he was here. So of course his letters came to the academy."

"While he was with you did his son ever come to visit him?"

"No, I never saw the boy, but he constantly spoke of his son, and if he is the party for whom you are looking I have no doubt that he has or had a son. That seems to be the fact which you wished to substantiate, I believe?"

"Yes, that is all that I wish, except that I would like to find the son. However, as you cannot aid me there, I bid you good morning, and I thank you for your courtesy."

Leaving the academy, Mr. Barnes walked as far as the nearest station of the elevated railroad and went down town to Grand street; thence he walked to the office of the Norwich line of steamers. Addressing the clerk, he said:

"Do you keep a passenger list?"

"Well, hardly that, in the strict sense of the term. But we keep the names of all who take staterooms."

"Can you let me see that list for last Saturday night's steamer?"

The list was handed to him, and he carefully ran his finger over the column until it rested on the name "Walter Marvel". He copied the number of the stateroom assigned, and left the dock with a smile of satisfaction.

"I think I may have some dinner now," said he to himself, and he entered a restaurant where he partook of a substantial meal, after which he went to police headquarters, asked for the inspector and was at once shown into the private office of that official.

"Good morning, inspector," said Mr. Barnes. "I would like to ask whether there has been a report of any missing in this city during this week?"

"Why, yes, there has!" The inspector eyed him keenly. "Mr. Barnes, what do you know?"

"I am working on the Lewis murder case, inspector; up in Lee, N. H., you know."

The inspector nodded, and Mr. Barnes continued:

"I have left the Pilkingtons because they permitted another man to interfere with me. If my theory be correct, I must trace a man from this city to Lee."

"If you have left the Pilkingtons," said the inspector, "I will help you. A woman reported here yesterday that her husband had been missing since last Saturday and that she feared foul play. I put a man on the case, and he has traced him as far as a sound steamer; so he is probably down your way."

"Is any name given?"

"Yes, but as you must be in a hurry, take the papers with you. I intrust the whole matter to your judgment."

Mr. Barnes thanked the inspector for this mark of confidence, and then left the building. Half an hour later he was at a fashionable up town hotel and had sent his card up to the woman named. In a few minutes more he was in her presence.

"I see by your card that you are a detective," began the woman, "and I suppose that you have brought me news of my husband."

"I have found out that he left the city last Saturday night. Did you know of his intention to do so?"

"I did not, but it does not surprise me that he has done so. Where has he gone?"

"I came to see if you can help me on that point. All I know is that he went away on a sound steamer. Have you any idea of any object which would call him east?"

"Yes, but I may be wrong and would prefer not to commit myself. I might be betraying what he wishes kept private."

"Will you answer a few other questions?"

"I will answer all that I think I should."

"First, then, tell me how long your husband has been in New York."

"We arrived about two weeks before he disappeared."

"You say 'arrived.' Am I to understand that you came from abroad?"

"Yes. We have been in Europe for many years."

"Had your husband any special reason for returning to America?"

"Yes, but I cannot explain that to you further than to say that it is a purpose which for many years he has wished to accomplish."

"Why, then, did he delay the matter so long?"

"I must not tell you that." She colored deeply.

"I do not desire to appear too inquisitive, madam, but if you wish me to accomplish anything you must give me more information. Tell me this: Do you suppose that it is in pursuance of this purpose that your husband has gone out of the city?"

"I fear so."

"You fear so? Is there any danger, then, that he risks?"

The woman bit her lip at this slip and said:

"There might be. I do not know."

"Has he gone in search of an enemy?"

"I cannot say." She seemed decidedly uneasy at the questions of the detective. The latter paused a moment, considering, and then asked:

"Do you know the name of this man who is your husband's enemy?"

"I did not say that it is a man or that my husband has an enemy."

"You did not, but that is evidently the case. Now, do you happen ever to have heard of John Lewis?"

The woman started up in dismay and excitedly exclaimed:

"What do you know of that man?"

"Then you admit that you know him?"

"I know who he is, but what is it that you know, and why do you mention his name?"

"I know, madam, that your husband left this city for the east on Saturday night last, and that on the following night John Lewis was murdered."

"My God! This is terrible!" cried the woman, as she sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Mr. Barnes waited a moment for her to recover from her surprise and then said:

"I will tell you more. An innocent man has been arrested for the crime and is in prison."

"How does all this interest me? Of course it shocked me to hear so suddenly that one whom I knew has been murdered, but further than that what is it to me?"

"That is what I am trying to find out. Was Mr. Lewis a friend of yours?"

"A friend? Far from it," she answered almost fiercely.

"Ah! Then it is not his death that troubles you?"

"Who says that I am troubled?"

"I do, and I think it is because you know or think that your husband went to that town expressly to kill Lewis."

"He did nothing of the kind," she answered quickly, losing her self-possession in her excitement. "My husband only wanted to recover his child, whom that man had stolen from him."

"At last we have it," said Mr. Barnes with satisfaction. "Your husband, then, is the father of the girl. In that case you must be her mother, and therefore Lewis' sister?"

"His sister? Her mother? You are mad."

"Explain it, then." Mr. Barnes was puzzled.

"I will explain nothing. You have got more out of me now than I should have told."

"Then I will hunt for your husband, for he must be the man who killed Mr. Lewis. Let me tell you that I have tracked him backward from the scene of the crime to this city. Another detective followed his trail from the murderer, but he did not succeed in apprehending him."

"Then, thank God, he is safe!"

"You are wrong. The other detective failed, but I will not."

"You dare to tell me this and want my help?"

"We must think of the innocent."

"What do I care for the innocent? I do not know them."

"Let me tell you who they are. There is the girl, the daughter of your husband."

"Ah! Is she accused?"

"She is thought to be an accessory."

"Good! I am glad. And the other, who is that? You spoke of a man."

"The other is thought to be the murderer. It is Walter Marvel."

"What! Young Walter? This is worse than I could have imagined. Well, so be it. I care nothing for him either."

"Madam, have you no heart? Would you see the innocent suffer for the guilty?"

"The innocent? How do I know who are innocent? You say these people are accused. The authorities must know what they are doing. There must be evidence against them, and most likely they are guilty. Why should I do anything, and what can I do anyway?"

"All I ask of you is to give me the information that I wish."

"What information?"

"Tell me the exact relations which exist between your husband and John Lewis."

"I will tell you nothing."

"You are determined?"

"I am! Do your worst!"

"Very well, madam! Perhaps I may yet find a way to make you suffer for your stubbornness."

"How dare you threaten me? I'll have you turned out of this hotel!"

"Stop a minute! You forgot that I am a detective. If you ring, I will arrest you."

"Arrest me? And pray what charge will you make? I am not easily frightened."

"I will charge you with complicity in the murder of John Lewis!"

"That is farcical. I have been in New York only."

"You are an accessory before the fact. You knew that your husband went out of the city with a murderous intent. Therefore I think that in this state, under our penal code, you could be indicted as a principal."

"Curse you, you are a demon!"

Mr. Barnes considered a moment, and then said:

"I have half a mind to arrest you anyway!"

"Do so if you wish! But I will tell you nothing, though I should be kept in prison forever."

"I haven't time to wait in the city, or I would try the experiment. As it is, I must be sure that I can get you when I want you." So saying, Mr. Barnes stepped up to the electric call and pressed the button. A moment later a bellboy knocked at the door. Mr. Barnes opened it and said:

"Call a district messenger and bring me some writing materials!"

"What do you mean to do?" asked the woman.

"You shall see."

In a short time the bellboy returned, and with him the messenger. Mr. Barnes took a piece of paper and wrote as follows:

Send me your best shadow. Important.

BARNES.