

Amber's answer was characteristic. With his disengaged hand, he lifted a chair, swung it once in a circle round his head, and sent it smashing through the window.

They heard the faint cackle of it as it struck the street below, the tinkle of falling glass, and then a police whistle.

Lambaire stood back from the door and flung it open.

"You can go," he said between his teeth. "I shall remember you."

"If you don't," said Amber, with his arm round the boy, "you've got a jolly bad memory."

CHAPTER III.

Introduces Peter, the Romancist.

AMBER had £86 10s.—a respectable sum.

He had an invitation to take tea with Cynthia Sutton at five o'clock in the afternoon. He had a pleasant room in Bloomsbury, a comfortable arm-chair, a long, thin, mild cigar and an amusing book, and he was happy. His feet rested on a chair, a clock ticked—not un-musically—it was a situation that makes for reverie, day-dreams, and sleep. His condition of mind might be envied by many a more useful member of society, for it was one of complete and absolute complaisance.

There came a knock at the door, and he bade the knocker come in.

A neat maid entered with a tray, on which lay a card, and Amber took it up carelessly.

"Mr. George Whitey," he read. "Show him up."

Whitey was beautifully dressed. From his glossy silk hat to his shiny patent shoes, he was everything that a gentleman should be in appearance.

He smiled at Amber, placed his top-hat carefully upon the table, and skinned his yellow gloves.

Amber, holding up the card by the corner, regarded him benevolently.

When the door had shut—"And what can I do for you, my Whitey?" he demanded.

Whitey sat down, carefully loosened the buttons of his frock-coat, and shot his cuffs.

"Name of Amber?" His voice was a very high one; it was of a whistling shrillness.

Amber nodded. "The fact of it is, old fellow," said the other, with easy familiarity, "Lambaire wants an understanding, an undertaking, and—er—um—"

"And who is Lambaire?" asked the innocent Amber.

"Now, look here, dear boy," Whitey bent forward and patted Amber's knee, "let us be perfectly frank and above board. We've found out all about you—you're an old lag—you haven't been out of prison three days—am I right?"

He leant back with the triumphant air of a man who is revealing a well-kept secret.

"Bull's-eye," said Amber calmly. "Will you have a cigar or a butter dish?"

"Now we know you—d'ye see? We've got you taped down to the last hole. We bear no resentment, no malice, no nothing."

"No anything," corrected Amber. "Yes—?"

"This is our point," Whitey leant forward and traced the palm of his left hand with his right finger. "You came into the Whistlers—bluffed your way in—very clever, very clever—even Lambaire admits that—we overlook that; we'll go further and overlook the money."

He paused significantly, and smiled with some meaning.

"Even the money," he repeated, and Amber raised his eyebrows.

"Money?" he said. "My visitor, I fail to rise to this subtle reference."

"The money," said Whitey slowly and emphatically, "there was close on a hundred pounds on Lambaire's table alone, to say nothing of the other tables. It was there when you came in—it was gone when you left."

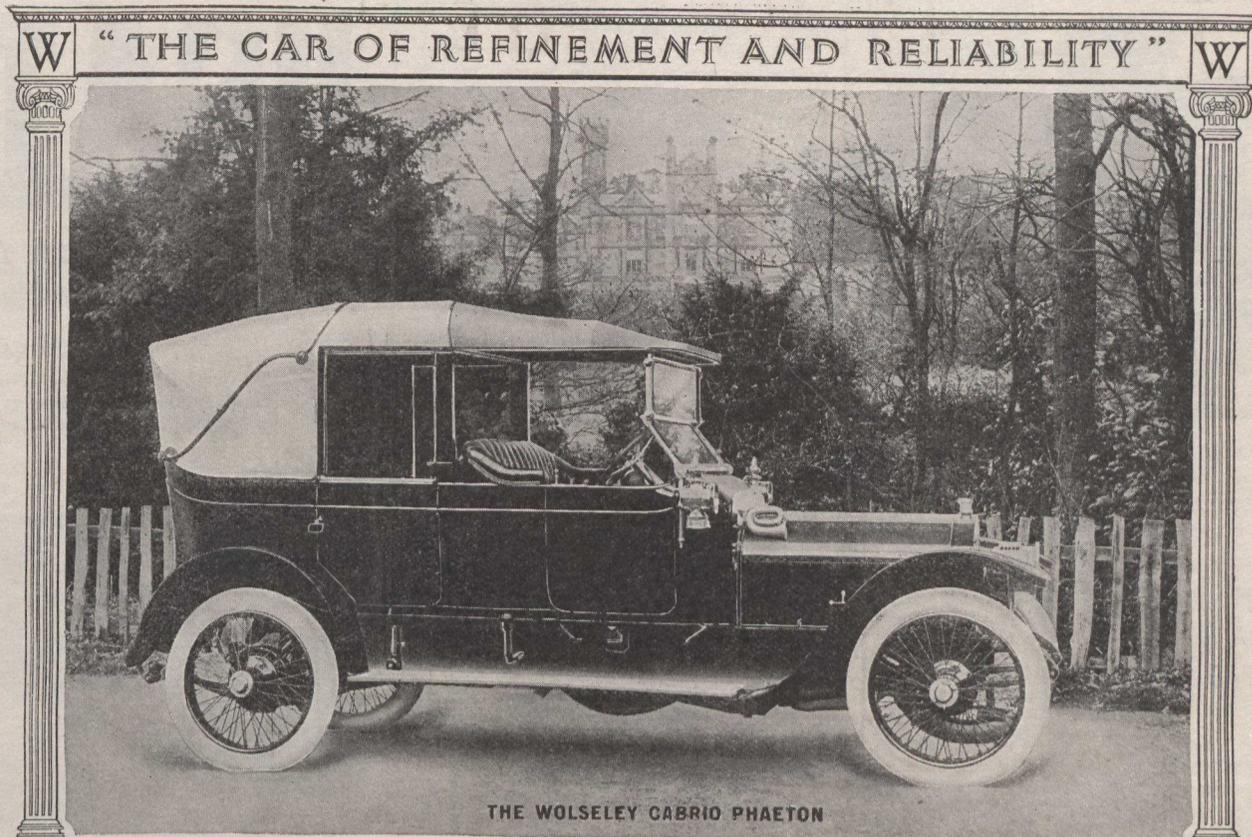
Amber's smile was angelic in its forgiveness.

"May I suggest," he said, "that I was not the only bad character present?"

"Any way; it doesn't matter, the money part of it," Whitey went on. "Lambaire doesn't want to prosecute."

"Ha! ha!" said Amber, laughing politely.

"He doesn't want to prosecute; all he wants you to do is to leave young Sut-



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