CHAPTER I

THE Corsairs' Club was at once the highest and the lowest night club in all New York, Geoffrey Platt explained.

It was highest, not only in the sense that it was high hat and that its prices were so absurdly far above reason, but also in the sense of position; for it was perched on the top of the Allegheny Building, sixty stories above Times Square. It was lowest only in reputation.

It was a bungalow built by the Allegheny's architect. He intended it as a shelter for a dancing blonde, but she left him before it was finished and after he was broke. She, the wise-crackers said, went to a man who owned a fancy cellar. And the architect went to "Big Joe" Carozzo, who at that time ran a spaghetti joint in Greenwich Village.

"My penthouse against a hundred thousand dollars," he offered. "One throw of the dice, and high man wins."

Carozzo sent the dice spinning on the green table in his back room.

"What's a penthouse?" he asked.

"My bungalow on the Allegheny roof."

Carozzo rolled two six-spots. The architect rolled a pair of deuces and blew out his brains.

Thus the house built for secrecy and illicit love became a place of notoriety and illicit liquor, though illicit love still found shelter there—and even before it opened as a cabaret the Corsairs had its reputation. The murder of "Spots" Larkin was not needed to draw the crowds. It helped, naturally, but not so much as Carozzo expected.

The dizzy height of its setting was one of the cabaret's attractions. Men and women, before they became too tipsy, liked to stroll out onto the roof between dances, to laugh, to lie, to look down on the field of lights, and to ponder on suicide or murder.

It gave one a delicious shivery feeling to stand by the shoulder-high stone parapet—clutching it tightly—and wonder what it would be like to fall to crooked Broadway, eight hundred feet below, turning over and over in the air, watching the street rush up at you, widening, menacing, inescapable. Or perhaps one wondered how someone else would feel—say a husband, or a wife.

There was always a cool breeze, always the chance to put an arm around a girl—most of them felt as if the building were going to fall—always a chance to laugh and repeat that gag about "a cool roof and a hot mama."

One could see all New York from this roof if the night were clear—the lighted towers of lesser build-

ings, steeples, roofs, streets slashed with light, streets dark save for the scurrying rays of headlights, ferries crossing the Hudson, great ships putting out to sea —gigantic glowworms—the red light far to the south that marked the tower of the Woolworth Building, a structure almost as high as the Allegheny, the chain of lights along the Hudson, search lights fingering the sky.

It was still up here—when the music died in the cabaret—and the shouts of newsboys rose, and the honk of auto horns.

The Corsairs' was highest, too, in the sense that the "best people" came here night after night, though they frequently brought the worst company with them. One had to be known to Big Joe Carozzo and his roughneck crew of guards in the lobby to be admitted. One had to be in evening dress—for Carozzo insisted on "class." And one must not come alone—for the solitary visitor is sometimes a husband looking for his wife.

The cabaret boasted an excellent orchestra, a good show, the prettiest girls in the city, the finest spaghetti and ravioli, the best bootleg, and the smoothest dance floor. But one had only to enter and look around to feel himself in a dive.

Perhaps it was the dice game and the architect's suicide that were responsible for the sinister atmosphere of the place. Perhaps it was Big Joe's own reputation. Those who claimed to know said he had

been a rum pirate. He had stolen a ship, they said, manned it with murderers, captured and scuttled other ships that were running rum into Yew York, and made millions of dollars. They claimed, too, that he had once smuggled Chinese—and dumped them overboard when hard pressed by customs men. He was the "bootleg king" to them, and "a master of the dice."

Big Joe wasn't big except around the waist. He was of medium stature, dark, sleek, bland. He had black eyes that chilled you even when they blazed, and little waxed points to his black moustache. He wore three great diamonds in his shirt front and three diamonds on each hand.

It was on the morning of the Larkin murder that Geoffrey Platt exhibited the Corsairs to his friend Anson Keen, a deputy district attorney. They sat at a table close to the dance floor, under a black flag decorated with the skull and crossbones. There were many such flags in the place. They hung from the beams in the high ceiling; they were tacked to the walls; they fluttered from the rail of the balcony; they draped the casement windows.

Platt sat with his back to the window, his light blue eyes commanding the room. Keen sat directly across from him, looking out through the casement at a roof garden far away and far below him, a brightly lighted place that seemed to him like another planet.

"It's a joint," Keen said. "It's a den. There's something here that——"

"That you'd like to examine under a microscope, and label 'People's Exhibit A,'" Platt finished the thought. "Some day you may have the opportunity, Anse. I brought you here partly for that reason, partly to hear Pio Mora sing."

Keen smiled and nodded.

"But you don't come here night after night to hear Pio Mora," he said. He looked at his friend severely through his owlish spectacles. "You don't drink. You don't eat. You've sat over that glass of ginger ale ever since we came in here. What's the answer? A girl? The music? The faces? Why do you come here?"

"Maybe you'll know before very long."

Keen could make nothing of the expression on the thin pallid face—nothing but a baffling seriousness. He studied that face for a moment, the sandy hair brushed straight back from the high broad forehead, the straight fine nose, the wide, thin-lipped mouth, the ears that were arched rather than rounded at the top, the light blue eyes.

"I always said nobody in the world can look so dumb as you when you are most astute, nobody can look so sleepy as you when you are most alert. You've got something on your mind, Geoff, something troubling you. What is it?"

Platt did not answer.

"That little fellow in the corner," he said, motioning with his head, "the one with the overgrown girl. How do you see him?"

Keen was one of those philosophers who see, or pretend to see, the faces of birds and fish and animals in the faces of men and women. He had his own "Who's Zoo," he used to say, and most of his friends were in it, plainly and neatly labelled

"The man's a weasel," said Keen. "A ferocious, bloodthirsty little beast. Who is he? What enormous long arms he has!"

"That's Mickey Finn, one of Carozzo's killers. At the table behind him are Fannie Faire, the movie star, shopping for a new husband, and Billy Wren, the middleweight, shadow-boxing his silver flask."

"A peacock and an ape."

"And the girl going up to the balcony to sing?"

Keen took off his glasses, wiped them, adjusted them carefully, and stared. He drew in his breath a little. "That's a queen cobra," he announced. "A deadly and loyal snake."

"You're right," said Platt. He looked with frank admiration at his friend. "Her name is Marcia Caponi. She's Carozzo's girl. They call her 'Snake Eyes.' She bit a girl's wrist the other morning."

"Hungry?"

"The girl made some crack about Carozzo."

"How do you see people, Geoff?" Keen asked.

"Mostly as bones plastered with affectations,"

said Platt, rising suddenly, and hurrying toward the entrance door. He threw a quick "Excuse me" over his shoulder, waved his hand to someone Keen didn't see, and walked with quick springy steps toward a group of men at the door.

"Someone else for me to analyze," Keen thought. "Pio Mora, perhaps."

He looked at the men Platt greeted.

"A fox, a jackal, and a lion," he mused. "A sick lion."

He felt a trifle disappointed when Platt returned to the table with only "the fox," whom he introduced as "the proprietor, Mr. Carozzo." He took Carozzo's hand, a limp, moist, fat hand, and let it drop. He smiled, and trusted that Carozzo was not uneasy because of his presence there.

"The district attorney is most welcome," Carozzo said. "Maybe you will do me a favour some day. Who shall say? If there is anything you wish——"

He bowed.

"Just one thing," Keen said. "Why all these poison flags? Warning against bootleg booze?"

Carozzo laughed. "If they bring their own," he said, "I cannot be responsible. But when you have seen Pio Mora, you know all." He moved away with a smile.

"Ugh!" said Keen. "Looking into that man's eyes is like looking into a sewer. He's a fox, Geoff, a fat, cruel fox. Even to his foxy moustache tips.

What wouldn't I give to have him in the witness stand for half an hour. A fox in an eagle's nest! The man should live in a hole in the ground."

"He has a den in the next room," Platt said. "Spots Larkin and Anthony Sommers are going in there now. Larkin is the little rat——"

"Jackal."

"Jackal, if you will. He's been trying to sell a diamond. Kelly, the cop on the beat, says it's as big as a coconut. I wonder if Sommers is going to buy it for Carozzo."

"A hot diamond?"

"If it wasn't stolen how would that rat have it?"

"Not rat, Geoff, jackal. I insist."

"For that matter he looks like a leopard to me. Did you see his spotted face?"

"That's only his liver showing through his skin—or maybe it's his soul. But who's the sick lion?" He turned to watch Larkin and his companion manœuvre their way through the tables to a door on the other side of the room, a door marked "Private."

"Anthony Sommers, the fellow who sprung Mickey Finn."

"No!"

"Oh, yes. Sommers is Carozzo's mouthpiece ever since he got Finn off on a plea of self-defense. Finn shot his man in the back, but when Sommers began talking to the jury that didn't mean a thing. He could have shot the jury and won the keys to the city.

Carozzo gives Sommers all the booze he can drink—and Sommers seems to be satisfied with that arrangement. I wonder what Larkin will ask for that diamond."

"Tony Sommers! I wouldn't have known him. How hath the mighty fallen! But he still has the same fine brow, the same gray mane. Failure in every line of the face—but he still is Tony Sommers! Why, Geoff, some of his cases are in the textbooks."

He watched the show for a little while, seeing it and not seeing it, thinking of Sommers and what he had been. He twisted around to find Geoff talking in whispers to a pretty brunette, the cigarette girl.

So! It was a girl after all, then? And such a hard little girl! Geoffrey Cameron Platt, III, scion of a great family, heir to millions—"New York's most eligible bachelor"—and this girl. What would his brother, the senator, say? And his sister, who had become a Belgian countess? Was the boy mad?

The girl left the table quickly, and Geoff rose and once more excused himself.

"Anse," he said, "I've just decided to go to Paris on the *Île de France*. She leaves at nine o'clock this morning. Mind if I do some telephoning?"

He had left before Keen could do more than gasp, and it was almost an hour before he slid back into his seat. The pirate number, the big hit of the show, the justification of the cover charge, and the reason of the decorations, had just begun.

Sixteen slim young beauties, dressed as pirates never were on land or sea, dancing bits of colour and powdered legs and arms, capered on the dance floor. Their heels beat a rhythm on the polished wood. The 'cello laughed. The rowdy saxophone guffawed. The violins tittered. At times the words came through the music clearly:

"We are the pirates of old Times Square
Cruising around for a millionaire. . ."

Pio Mora rushed out of the darkness and stood in front of the girls, a knife blade held in his gleaming teeth, a guitar in his terrible hands. He was more than six feet tall, and his shoulders were wide as a door. He was dressed in a comic make-up—a red bandana tied with a true lovers' knot in the back of the head, a speckled silk shirt that billowed like an Argentine dancer's and buttoned at the neck, a yellow sash bristling with the wooden butts of derringers and the handles of knives, baggy red knee breeches, barber-pole stockings, and square-toed shoes with silver buckles.

His moustaches were heavy and long and red. Great hoops of gold dangled from his hairy ears, hollow hoops filled with jingling noises, hoops that seemed part of the man and not of the costume.

The funny good-nature of the disguise intensified the villainy of the face, brought out the wild green eyes, the shaggy red brows, the prodigious nose, and

the white scar that ran from the bridge of it down across the left cheek. Keen wondered what weapon had hewed that white path. A woman's knife?

"Tiger! Tiger!" he yelled. One had to yell to be heard. Platt appeared not to hear. He had seen Carozzo talking to the waiter known as "Flat Wheel," and he was watching the latter flat-foot his way through the tables to the door of Carozzo's den.

Mora was getting ready to sing, and the place was getting ready for him. He had taken the knife from his teeth and had thrust it into his sash. It seemed to be a signal, for the powdered legs came down with a slam, and the orchestra stopped, mid-note, leaving the music to hang in the air. There was a hush even among the diners who had been applauding boisterously half a second before. No dish rattled in the kitchen, nor in the service bar. No knife touched china at any table, nor did any glass clink against bottle under the tables.

Mora's "deep sea bass"—Platt's phrase—was to fill that silence now, fill it like a wind bellying the sails of a ship, making them crack, tearing them loose. He would strum the guitar and bellow:

"*Sixteen men on a dead man's chest——*"

And before one could recover from the shock of it, the orchestra, the girls, everybody present, would join in the thunderous last line:

"*Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!*"

The room hushed. Pio Mora raised a hand above the guitar, opened his mouth to sing.

And across that sudden silence there came, shocking as a woman's scream, the shrill voice of the waiter:

"Murder! Larkin's murdered!"

One of the little pirates—she who was known as "Snake Eyes"—stifled a scream. The trap-drummer dropped a stick. The movie star drew her ermine wrap close about her, as though she were cold. A drunken woman said, "Oh, my God!" Another laughed and called for an encore.

"Stuck in the neck," said the waiter. "Stuck like a pig!"

Carozzo's voice was calm.

"Where's Sommers?"

"I don't know."

"And the diamond——?"

"I don't know."

Keen jumped up.

"Don't let anybody leave this place," he said. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was almost two o'clock.

CHAPTER II

SPOTS LARKIN'S head and shoulders lay on a card table near the centre of the den. The face was half hidden in a litter of red wet cards. The chair on which he sat was tilted forward. His legs were sprawled beneath the table, an empty whisky bottle near the right shoe. His hands clutched the edge of the table, as though by clinging there they would cling to life.

The hair on his head, that had been combed into a thick sleek pompadour, stood up in little wisps, like the leaves of a plant withered and blackened by frost.

The shaft of a spindle, a round steel shaft, sticky, red, reared up out of the back of his neck. It was a spindle such as is used for filing bills. There were a dozen like it on the flat-topped desk—within arm's reach of the body.

"Cold-blooded murder!" Deputy District Attorney Keen said, looking down at the stiffening hands.

"Why?" Platt asked. "It might have been done by a hot-blooded woman for all you know."

"Nonsense. Sommers killed him, stole his diamond, and escaped."

"Nonsense yourself! Sommers did not kill him, and he hasn't escaped. He's lying out there on the roof."

The body of a man could be seen outside the French windows, face in the gravel. The electric light bulbs on the fire escape showed him plainly.

The district attorney's representative stepped through the window, and returned in a few moments, to find Platt seated in a chair studying one of the spindles.

"You're right," Keen said. "It's Sommers. Dead drunk. If he stole the diamond he passed it to a confederate, or hid it. I searched him."

Platt smiled at his friend.

"You haven't searched the body yet," he said. "How do you know the diamond's gone?"

"It's reasonably certain," Keen answered. He frowned, and said no more until Captain O'Malley of the homicide squad arrived with his men.

O'Malley was a short, thickset, red-faced man with domineering eyes and a bulldog expression about his mouth and chin. He took command at once, searched Larkin, found nothing but a loaded revolver, a small amount of money, a nail file, a pocket comb, and a lady's scented handkerchief. He delegated men to question Carozzo, Mora, the girls, the waiters, the patrons—a frightened, in-

dignant, half-hysterical, half-sober crowd. He directed others to sift the gravel.

"Get a coupla sieves," he said, "and a coupla shovels, and get busy."

"I've notified the medical examiner," Platt said.

"We'll search the body further when he gets here," O'Malley said. "He'll wait. Mannix! Moffett! Bring in that drunk. Mr. Keen says he's been frisked. But—frisk him again before you trot him in."

A handkerchief lay in the waste-paper basket near the card table. O'Malley picked it up, his fingers barely touching one corner of it. He looked at the splotches of blood, the monogram.

"Who's A. S.?" he asked.

"Anthony Sommers," said Platt.

O'Malley whistled.

"What a tough break for you!" he said to Keen, as Detective Sergeants Mannix and Moffett came through the open window with the lawyer. The man was ill. His face and his hands were splotched with blood. His stiff shirt bosom was stained. Little pieces of gravel clung to his gory face, fell from his gray mane—yet he carried himself proudly.

"A lion and a bulldog," Keen whispered, watching the prisoner and the police captain.

"What you find on him?" O'Malley demanded.

"A ticket to Detroit, a roll of bills, and some letters."

"Detroit, eh? Across the line from Canada." He turned savagely on Sommers. "Couldn't make the fire escape, eh? Too drunk for the big getaway! What you do with the diamond?"

Sommers, despite his illness, managed to stand erect. He looked the captain in the eye.

"I have nothing to say," he said.

O'Malley thrust out the handkerchief, almost brushing Sommers's face with it.

"That's yours, ain't it?"

"I have nothing to say."

O'Malley lost patience.

"Throw him in the can," he said, and as they were going out, he barked: "Send in Hanson."

The five men waited more or less patiently for the coming of the medical examiner—Keen at the window, staring down on a building climbing on strings of steel across the street from the Allegheny, Hanson on his knees by the mulberry couch, rummaging through the waste-paper basket, heaping little piles of paper on the satin, scanning scraps, sorting them; Patrolman Kelly, brought up from his beat, standing guard at the door; O'Malley wandering restlessly through the room; Platt sitting in an easy chair, his back to the dead man, his legs thrust out in front of him.

O'Malley stopped in his stride and laughed loudly. Hanson looked up, annoyed, and went back to his task. Patrolman Kelly cleared his throat.

Keen left the window, sat down beside his friend, and asked: "What's the joke?"

"I was just thinking of the iron bars on them bedroom windows," O'Malley said, waving a hand in the general direction of the door that opened on Carozzo's bedroom. "Did Big Joe put them up to keep visitors out, or to keep them in? And did you see the mirrors in the ceiling? And the pictures of naked hussies all over this room—did you notice them? Ah, leave it to you!"

"This was a library before Carozzo took over the place," Platt said. "It was a beautiful room. Bookcases ran up to the eaves. Tapestries hung between them. Carozzo sold them, and covered the bare walls with such art as he could appreciate. He turned that beautiful oak table into a bar, put in these card and dice tables, the cuspidors, and that desk. By the way, Captain, did you have a good look at the spindles?"

O'Malley picked up one and eyed it critically.

"Holy mackerel!" he said.

On the conical leaden base there were three small carved figures, etchings of martyred saints.

"An artist in this den of thieves? Who is he, Mr. Platt?"

"Pio Mora. A talented fellow, Captain. He sings. He dances. He carves beautiful things—though he does run to torture. I've been wondering what suffering saint killed the jackal."

Dr. Korn, the medical examiner, a cheerful man with a roly-poly figure, came in briskly, bobbed his head, beamed, threw down his black bag, unloosed the dead hands, propped the body into a sitting position, and addressed himself to Kelly.

"Officer, would you be so kind as to hold up his head while I make my examination? Thank you so much."

Kelly came forward, stopped. "Mother of God!" he said softly.

The blood had started afresh. It fell on the spindle base, on the carved figure of the crucified, dripped from it to the wilted shirt front.

The doctor made his examination in silence, and beamed. Platt thought he would look just that way if he had had occasion to say, "It's a boy, Captain. Congratulations!"

"Beautiful job!" he said. "Death almost instantaneous. I should say it occurred about one o'clock. Nice clean death. Anybody got a drink?"

"Kelly, get somebody in here to make a thorough search of this stiff," O'Malley ordered.

"Maybe that diamond is sewed in the lining of his coat."

"I got it here," said Hanson, rising. O'Malley and Keen crossed the room to him quickly.

Platt looked puzzled.

"A hunk of glass!" O'Malley said.

"Damn!" Keen exploded.

"That proves Sommers is innocent," said Platt. "Somebody tossed it into the wastebasket to throw suspicion on Sommers. The same hand dropped the handkerchief there, too. The idea was to make us think Sommers killed Larkin for this piece of glass, believing it genuine, and—finding it no good at all—threw it away."

"This was covered with gum," said Hanson. "I cut into the gum with my knife. I—I guess I broke some splinters off the damn thing."

"Gum? What's the meaning of that?" asked Keen.

Platt shrugged his shoulders.

"The show's over so far as I'm concerned, gentlemen," he said. "I'm leaving for Paris in a few hours, and I must pack. I wish I could stay and prove Sommers is being framed, but——"

"Framed, hell!" Keen said angrily. "He was the only man in this room at one o'clock this morning—and I can swear to it. He——"

Platt's pale blue eyes looked dumb.

"You don't even know where I was at one o'clock, Anse," he said gently. "You think I was telephoning. But was I?"

Keen snorted, and then shook hands with his friend.

"Good-bye, Geoff," he said. "Drop me a postcard from Paris. Will you be back for the execution?"

"We both should live so long," Platt said—and as he left the room he put his hand in his right waistcoat pocket, and his fingers caressed a diamond.

"It isn't as big as a coconut," he thought, "but it's as big as the world at that."

CHAPTER III

MOLLY SOMMERS stood on the top of Sentry Hill and shaded her eyes with her hand.

"Oh, please get out of that car, Ted," she called. "Don't be so lazy. This is the most beautiful sight in the world."

A rain-washed world stretched out below her, a crazy quilt of landscape with patches of woodland and young corn and tobacco and buckwheat sewed into the pattern with rail-fence stitches.

Far in the distance the village of Sommerville sprawled over its little hill, like a lot of toy houses and stores and churches some child had spilled. White smoke spirals went up from it. Back of it were green hills dreaming in the sun, cloud shadows tickling their sides. Straight down at the bottom of the cliff the Racket River ran.

The scent of pennyroyal and wild cherry blossoms filled her nostrils. Young mullein leaves and the tops of daisies rubbed against her ankles. The branches above her had put on their bridal finery, and up in the sky a chicken hawk was painted on a cloud.

The huge young man who sat beside the wheel

of the green roadster watched the yellow hair escaping from beneath the blue felt toque and playing with the winds, watched the winds billowing the blue skirt, whipping it against the shapely legs.

"I see more beauty than you will ever realize," he answered. He stood up, and jumped. He ran toward her, but as he neared the edge of the cliff he stopped; and she saw that he was pale and trembling.

"I forgot," she said, taking his hands, and walking with him.

"It always gives me the creeps, Molly, looking down from any height," he said. He was trying to laugh at himself, she saw.

They sat in the grass and the daisies. Petals fell from white branches over them. The river gurgled. Wheels rumbled and creaked on the steep still road.

Faint cocks crowed in the depths unseen.

"I can't even dream of heights but I wake up in terror. Ever since——"

His brown eyes widened, and she moved closer to him, wishing—for the moment—that he was a little boy she could take on her lap and mother. But he was so big, so strong! Ted Morehouse was the strongest man in Crawford County, she thought, looking at his wide shoulders, his square jaw, his wild black hair, his big hands. The strongest and the shyest. Men and boys loved him, imitated him, liked to be seen with him. Girls pursued him—subtly at times—and he ran. He was awkward with

them. But he had known Molly all her life. And he had loved her ever since he could remember.

She remembered when that fear was born in him. It was years ago, when his dog had fallen over the cliff chasing a rabbit. How cautiously, how fearfully, he had gone down that almost precipitous slope, clutching a branch here, a stone there, feeling with his feet for some place, some object on which he could stand long enough to move one hand for a hold lower down. The dog was dead when Ted reached it, and he held it in his arms for hours. He stood frozen against the rock, looking down, unable to climb up, afraid to move, until Molly had brought men with a rope.

"Does it—does it make any difference to you, Molly?" he asked, avoiding her gray eyes. His hands were steady now, but listless.

"Of course it doesn't, Ted," she said, almost angrily.

"I was afraid," he said, and now he looked at her. "I was afraid, but I came to you anyway, Molly. I love you!"

Now it was she who avoided his eyes, fearing her own might tell secrets. He whispered:

"Will you marry me?"

Every little bit of her wanted to cry out, "Of course I will, I've always intended to marry you; I was born to marry you." But instead she said:

"I love you, too, Ted. You know that. Sometimes

the tears come to my eyes when I think of you. I've loved you ever since you were a boy—a frightened boy holding a dead dog in his arms and trying not to cry. But, oh, Ted, how can I marry you?"

"But ever since we were kids——"

She put a cool hand over his mouth.

"I am the breadwinner now," she said. "Mama doesn't make much money out of her little hat shop. But with what I make for teaching school it keeps the house, feeds us all, clothes us. My sisters are going to school. They must have a good education, and——"

"And we must wait?"

"Ella will be through Normal next month. If she doesn't marry, Ted—maybe—maybe next September she can take my place. Then——"

There was a virginal shyness in her last word; but it was wasted on him. He was looking at a robin in the wild cherry tree, and his hands were idly rubbing one little stone against another.

"If your father hadn't run off and left you, we could have married long ago," he said.

"What do you know of my father?" she demanded angrily, her gray eyes so close to his they startled him. "You couldn't understand him, ever. Nobody understands him but his oldest daughter. Not even Mama. Anthony Sommers! Why, the name is like a bugle call to me. It holds a magic for me. It lifts me out of myself. It makes me tingle. It's a shiny name. A name like a star.

"Oh, he's black and gold—Anthony Sommers, my father. He drinks, and he swears, and he does as he pleases. He wanders where he will, and accounts for his actions only to himself. But would you have him waste his life in a little town on a hill? Would you make rules for such a man?"

"But if he supported his family——"

It was as if she had not heard him. "My father is the last of the Sommers men," she went on, the anger ebbing out of her eyes and dreams flooding them, "the last of a line of splendid ne'er-do-wells! And he never will have a son. One of his ancestors wandered to New York three hundred years ago. There were Sommers men on both sides in the Revolution, on both sides in the Civil War. One of them was my grandfather, Colonel Abner Sommers. Your father was named for him, and so was Sommerville."

Ted smiled and imitated his father's voice: "Old Colonel Sommers, he picked him a reg'ment off these Wisconsin hills like another man might pick posies. And when he got them down South, danged if they wasn't all nettles!"

They laughed together, and Molly let him hold her hands.

"Forgive me for being angry, Ted," she said. "But when you speak of my father——"

"Molly, if he knew we wanted to marry he'd come home, wouldn't he?"

"I'll write him to-night and see."

"And if he doesn't come?"

"We'll wait until September—or later."

After that she let him draw her close to him, let him hold her, let him kiss her. She clung to him a moment, then leaped up and ran to the car, singing a gay song. He caught her, lifted her easily into the seat beside the wheel, and jumped in after her. It was an amazing jump. She clapped her hands, and snuggled close to him.

"The wind is blowing you to me, Molly," he said.

"The wind has nothing to do with it," she answered.

Mrs. Sommers came to the door when the car stopped in front of the house—a white house with green blinds, a house set back from a garden where lilacs and tulips grew. She stood, hands on hips, trying to frown, and not succeeding.

"What happened this time?" she cried to Molly. "Another blow-out?"

The pair of them always took hours to come home from Molly's school on a Friday. Wonder how it was they went so quickly over the same road on Monday morning. Wonder? Not at all.

Molly ran to her mother, kissed her gently, yanked at the graying red hair. "We're going to be married," she whispered. Ted came bounding up the stairs. "We're going to be married," he shouted.

Mrs. Sommers held them both, there on the wide front porch, for all Sommerville to see.

"I'm not surprised a bit," she said. She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. "Not a bit, Ted. But what will your folks say?"

"They won't be surprised either," said Ted. "Nor will anyone else in the village."

He was not quite frank in this, but Mrs. Sommers was not deceived. She knew how people talked about Ted Morehouse, the son of the banker, the merchant, the rich tobacco grower—and of Molly Sommers, the daughter of a dissolute wandering lawyer. She knew Sommerville would be surprised. And she sighed, and hurried into the house, calling over her shoulder that she would bring some lemonade.

Perhaps she told the news to Molly's sisters, for they came running out, shouting. They circled about Ted and Molly. "When's it going to be, Ted? Can I be bridesmaid? Molly, can I be flower girl? What'll you wear, Molly? Shame on Molly! Shame on Ted."

Catherine, the youngest, turned up her little nose, pretended to pick up her bridal train and to adjust her wedding veil. She began to sing, in a most unmusical voice: "Here comes the bride, boob by her side!"

Molly snatched her up and kissed her and hugged her.

"You can all be bridesmaids and flower girls," she said. "We'll have to wait until Ella comes home from school, though."

"Will you have a cake? Will you go on a wedding

tour? Can I have your bed, Molly? Molly loves Te-ed! Molly lovesTe-ed!"

The paper boy, passing on his rounds, twisted a paper, threw it on the porch and shouted: "Hey, Molly—read it! Something about your old man."

Molly put down the child and picked up the twisted roll. She sat in the porch swing, smoothed out the paper, spread it on her lap, ran her finger down the "Home Folks" column, stopped.

Our distinguished fellow townsman, Mr. Anthony Sommers [she read], was put under arrest for murder this morning, we learn with sorrow, and this afternoon was indicted. Our deepest sympathy is with his wife and his five daughters.

Her eye went on reading:

Abijah Pinkham is building a new wing to his barn. Congratulations, Bije. . . .

But her mind was dazed.

Ted, her sisters, her mother standing in the doorway with a pitcher of lemonade and a tray containing glasses and a bowl of home-made cookies, looked at her, alarmed.

"Molly! Molly! What's happened?"

"Nothing, Mama," she said softly. "Only—only—" she stopped, looking at them as though they were strangers—"only—oh, Ted, darling, I can't marry you now."