

CHAPTER XXXIV

ACROSS the body of Carozzo, Ted and Molly looked at each other.

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"You must get away," she said quickly.

"You must come with me," he said.

They had spoken together.

"Come," she said, hurrying around that dread dead thing on the carpet to take his hand. "Hide the gun."

"Quick," he said. They started toward the door, when she stopped.

"Ted—suppose—suppose someone comes in! We—we can't leave him like this. They'd follow us. We can't——" She looked all around the room, for a rug, a shroud of some kind.

"The roses," she said. "Ted, the roses."

In her wide frightened eyes he saw what she had tried to say.

He took the roses from a vase on the desk and threw them on the body. Molly took what flowers there were on the long table. They worked feverishly,

pricking their hands with thorns, emptying the vases, piling the roses on the dead.

"Eighteen hundred dollars' worth of roses," Molly heard herself saying. "For you. Just for you."

She heard herself saying, too, the words of Judith's song:

My countenance hath deceived him to his destruction,
and yet hath he not committed sin with me, to defile and
shame me.

She felt guilty of this murder. Ted had killed him; but it was her fault. If the police caught Ted . . .

Carozzo was dead, and she could never free her father. But—but Ted might be put in the same penitentiary with him, if he were caught. Either that or—or the chair.

"Oh, come quickly," she cried. She seized his big cold wet hand and drew him away—and remembered only then that she had dropped the stiletto that was in her sleeve.

"Wait," she said, hysteria in her voice. It wouldn't do to leave that weapon in this room. She must find it.

She saw its hilt among the roses, the red stones like drops of blood. She snatched it up, and once more it was in her sleeve.

"We'll never get out of here," she thought.

They had almost gained the door when it opened.

And Geoffrey Platt bade her a courteous good-morning.

Molly and Ted stopped where they were, hand in hand. Platt looked from one to the other. He seemed startled at Ted's appearance.

"I didn't expect to see you here," he said, a light laugh sugaring his words. "Have you been walking around the roof all night?"

Ted met his laugh with one equally light.

"I couldn't get up the elevator," he said. "They wouldn't let me. So I came up the skyscraper next door. And jumped across."

"Jumped?"

"Oh, we rigged up a girder for a springboard," he said. "I'm taking Miss Sommers home with me this morning."

Platt bowed politely.

"You'd better change your clothes first," he said. "And if I were you, I'd take a cold bath!"

Something in his voice made Molly look at him sharply.

"A cold bath?" Ted asked.

"Cold," Platt said drily. "There's blood on your hands, you know."

Instinctively Molly stepped in front of Ted.

"He cut his hands," she said. She saw men in back of Platt, men she had never seen before. They were young men—but she knew they were detectives. What did it mean?

"I didn't mean to intrude," Platt explained. "I came to see Carozzo. Is he in the bedroom?"

They were trapped! They could not run out the door. She turned to the windows. Men were out there, looking through the panes, waiting.

"No," Molly said. "He is not in there."

Platt looked suddenly at a spot on the carpet, near the desk. Molly followed the direction of his eye, saw what he saw—blood.

He walked toward the desk, saw the mound of roses behind it.

Ted drew Molly toward him, and smiled at her. His left arm held her bright head to his cold wet shoulder, and his right hand held out the revolver to Platt.

"I'm sorry," Platt said. "More sorry than I can say. I must place you both under arrest on suspicion of homicide. And I must warn you"—it seemed to Molly that he was fighting for control of his voice—"that anything you may say may be used against you."

"Arrest?" Molly tore herself from Ted and faced him.

"Geoffrey Platt, who are you?"

"For the time being, Miss Sommers, I am a deputy police commissioner."

With a jerk of his head he motioned to the men back of him, and with Molly and Ted in front of him, he went into the cabaret.

The patrons had gone, and the orchestra: The newspaper men remained, seated at the long table near the dance floor. They looked as solemn as jurors, Molly thought. Near them, evidently under guard of detectives, were Mora, Theresa, Marcia, Mickey Finn, and the waiter, Flat Wheel.

Mora had washed off his clown make-up, and had put on his shiny blue suit and an orange tie. The tie covered most of the green shirt above the tight-fitting vest. Marcia was in scarlet touched with black. Her hands winked with jewels, and her left forearm was covered with bracelets. She sat close to Theresa and whispered to her. Theresa had put a bright shawl about her shoulders. The leering white skull that decorated a Jolly Roger rested above the head of Mickey Finn. Molly thought of Carozzo lying dead beneath his roses, and looked away from the flag, looked at the waiter.

Flat Wheel, she saw, was the only waiter in the place. There were detectives at all the doors, even at the door of the dressing room—detectives in evening clothes, detectives in plain clothes. And there were men in blue uniforms, too.

Molly had stopped a moment in the doorway, her hand tightening on Ted's. She started forward when she saw Henschell and Retticker getting up from their chairs.

"Sit down, gentlemen," she heard Platt's calm, soft voice behind her. "Please don't be impatient."

He gave a signal, Molly supposed, for a policeman came from the other side of the room and placed chairs for her and Ted, set them between the newspaper men's table, and the chairs where Mora sat with his companions.

"Please sit here," Platt said, when he had ushered Molly to the chair. "Don't be alarmed, and don't say anything until I ask you questions."

He confided Ted to the care of two men.

"Take him to my room," he said. "Let him take a bath and change his clothes. You needn't handcuff him."

"I'm all right," Ted spoke up. "Don't bother about me, Mr. Platt."

Molly smiled at him. He didn't want to leave her, even for a moment, she saw.

"Go, please, Ted," she said. "And put on something warm."

Ted looked at Platt suspiciously.

"This isn't a trick to—to——"

"To separate you and get you each to tell a different story? No. I will wait until your return."

"Thank you. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Platt whipped the cloth off a table, moved it directly in front of Molly, and sat down. The newspaper men were on his left, the others on his right. A young man, evidently a stenographer—because he carried a notebook, and there was a sheaf of pencils in the breast pocket of his coat—sat himself

at Platt's left. He put his notebook on the table, and began to sharpen pencils. He seemed to be the only active person in all this eerie room. The sound of his knife on the lead grated on Molly's nerves.

"Gentlemen," Platt addressed the reporters, "I promised you the greatest story of your careers. You shall have it—in due time. I brought you here that you might right a great wrong—and I have stumbled on what seems to be a murder!"

Mora sprang up.

"Joe!" he cried in his terrible voice. The stenographer dropped his pencils. One of the reporters jumped. Marcia gasped, and was silent.

"Be seated, everybody," Platt said calmly. "It is Big Joe, but——"

Several of the reporters started to run out. Platt motioned them to return.

"When Mr. Morehouse comes back," he said, "we will proceed. I know how eager you are to get into touch with your editors, to get out extras—but, until this investigation is over—or we find it necessary to adjourn to the district attorney's office—I must ask you all to remain in your seats, and to be quiet."

He stood up. He smiled.

And Anthony Sommers entered the room, walking with Deputy District Attorney Anson Keen.

CHAPTER XXXV

MOLLY's heart seemed to stop beating as she watched her father walk across the floor. She tried to spring up, and found no strength. She tried to cry "Father!" and could not. She wet her lips with her tongue.

He was strong, tanned, glowing with health. He was smiling, shaking his white mane as he clasped Platt's right hand.

The newspaper men were staring at him, even as she, even as those others on her left. If they had seen a dead man come walking out of his grave they could have been no less shocked. But Molly did not notice them. She kept looking at her father's face; seeing every little detail of it.

How long it was since she had seen him last—at the little depot in Sommerville where he had kissed her good-bye. She could see him against the rustic background now, as he stood whispering to Platt—the milk cans in a long row, their fat round sides in the shadow, their tops blinking in the sun, the ashes in the bed of the railroad tracks, ashes between the shining rails, between the worn-out wooden ties, the prairie that stretched out to the woods, daisies

running with gold and silver feet through the grass and the weeds, birds singing on the wires overhead, and the sound of the locomotive whistle coming from far down the track,

How cruel life had been to him since that day—and to herself. He had gone to New York. He had won astounding victories. His name had grown mighty, had become magic. He had been tried for murder, and found guilty. She had come to New York to save him. She had put aside love and honour and respect and everything that was dear to her.

And here he was, mysteriously out of his prison cell, greeting Geoffrey Platt, talking amiably with him and with Anson Keen—who had sent him to prison.

That convict had been right. The warden had lied to her. His secretary had lied to her. And Platt—only Platt knew why.

Her father was coming toward her!

Now she found strength to leap up. She ran to him, took him in her arms, kissed him, fondled his hands. And her lips kept saying, "Father! My father!"

He was shocked at seeing her; as shocked as she had been at seeing him.

They sat side by side. They attempted explanations but found they were merely mumbling incoherent words and exchanging looks of incredible amazement and delight.

"They told me at the prison——"

"But you—what are you—I don't understand, child—how you've grown!"

Ted came back while they were still fumbling with words. He had put on his tweeds, and he wore a polka dot four-in-hand. Molly remembered she had given him that tie.

Ted shook hands with Anthony Sommers.

"I can't say how glad I am to see you," Ted said. "You're the one man we need."

"Need?"

But there was no time for explanation. Platt was speaking.

"Gentlemen,"—Ted sat down beside Molly as Geoffrey Platt began his talk to the newspaper men—"you will please not consider this as any sort of court proceeding. It is merely a sort of investigation, and an explanation of a crime. I have been appointed, temporarily, as deputy police commissioner.

"It is unconventional, perhaps, to question witnesses in the presence of members of the press. I do not know that it has ever been done before, at least in New York. However, should anything develop that might be of a confidential nature, the publication of which would thwart the ends of justice, I trust you will omit it from your reports.

"I shall put none of these witnesses under oath. I shall force none of them to talk. That is—they are at liberty to keep silent, if they wish. But I believe they will talk.

“Captain O’Malley of the homicide squad, a few of his men, and Dr. Korn, the medical examiner, are in the next room. A crime has been committed there, and I expect, within a few moments, to learn all the details of it. Meanwhile, I propose to ask these witnesses a few questions.”

A detective came out of the den. He whispered something to Platt and Keen—the latter sitting at Platt’s right. Platt nodded, gave some instructions, and—when the detective had disappeared into the den—turned to Mora.

“Mora,” Platt said, “I warn you that anything you say may be used against you. And I ask you—when did you last see Carozzo? Remember, you do not have to tell me unless you wish to do so.”

The stenographer looked up from his notes.

“I talk,” Mora said. “I see Joe just a leetla while ago.”

“In his den?”

“Yes. I was to be hees bes’ man. Me! Hees bes’ man.”

“His best man? He was preparing to marry?”

“Correct! Me, I have make all the arrangement. Joe he was gon’ marry Mees Drew right away queeck thees morn’. I was to be hees bes’ man.”

“But you knew he had a wife—in Italy?” Platt asked.

“Yes, I know that.”

"And another one in Sicily?"

"And one more yet in Mexico," Mora answered. "But *madonna*—she never know about thees thing. We never tell."

Molly did not dare look at her father.

"You thought it all right for Carozzo to marry this innocent girl?" Platt demanded. "You thought it decent?"

Mora's only answer was a shrug of the shoulders. Molly looked at him, looked away from him quickly.

"What did you say to Carozzo?"

"I weesh heem good luck. I tell heem the car she ees wait downstairs, and the chauff, he ees freezing. He say he come right away. We have the so leetla drenk—to hees happiness. And I go. I never see heem again!"

"You didn't kill him?"

"No! No!"

He shook his head violently, gold hoops jingling madly.

The great white scar quivered, protested against this infamous accusation. The hairy hands knotted into fists.

"Eef I find who keel Joe," he roared, "Santa Maria, I slit hees throat." He started toward Platt. Two detectives jumped to stop him.

"With a spindle?" Platt asked gently.

Mora stopped. For a moment his face **flashed**

white—as if it had been miraculously repainted with the make-up he had washed off. And then he smiled ingratiatingly.

“Excuse, please!” he begged. “I was excite’. I don’t know what I say.”

“I ask you again,” said Platt, when Mora had taken his seat. “Did you shoot Big Joe Carozzo.”

“No,” the subdued giant said, his voice scarce more than a whisper. “I did not shoot heem.”

“Was there anyone else in the room at the time?”

“No.”

“Did you see anyone in the bedroom?”

“I see no one but Joe. An’—we shake hands before I go. An’ I say, ‘Good luck, Joe,’ and he say, ‘I come right away queeck.’ That’s all!”

“Where were you when the shot was fired?”

Mora shrugged his shoulders.

“Did you hear the shot fired?”

“I hear nothing. I am gon’ out of thees place when the police, they stop me.”

“You saw no one coming into the den as you went out?”

Mora’s only answer was made by the hollow hoops that hung from his hairy ears.

Ted rose before Molly could restrain him.

“What’s the use of all this?” he cried. “I fired the shot. You’ve got the gun. What else do you want?”

“He’s trying to save me,” cried Molly, springing

up to stand beside her lover. "He thinks I killed Carozzo. The revolver was lying there when Ted came into the den. I saw him pick it up. He thinks I shot him."

Platt gazed at the pair with something of a smile about his lips. He turned to Keen.

"Didn't I tell you?" he asked.

He turned to Molly.

"I told the deputy district attorney that you would try to take the blame to save him," he said, "and that he would confess to save you. It always happens that way. It's old stuff. It's been done too many times. Even your father knows that."

"I must request my daughter not to say another word," said Anthony Sommers, rising. "I appreciate what you have done for me, Mr. Platt, and what you intend to do. But my daughter's safety means more to me than anything else in life."

"Naturally," said Platt. "And if you will sit down and let me proceed, we will get through the sooner."

And now it was Marcia who had sprung up out of her chair. She ran at Platt like a scarlet streak.

"You are all trying to save her," she cried. "You all love her, you, her father, Mora, Henschell, Ret-ticker, him"—pointing to Ted. "You're all trying to save her. A room full of her lovers! And she killed him. She killed him! She stabbed him through the heart!"

Her voice rose to a shriek. Her finger pointed

dramatically at Molly, and wild lights burned in her black eyes.

“How do you know he was stabbed?” Platt asked.

“Look at her!” Marcia cried. “Blood on her hands. Blood on her wrist!”

Molly glanced down at her right hand. It did have blood on it.

The stiletto fell from her sleeve, and stuck in the floor.

The silver blade was red.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MOLLY stood very still, hands on her heart, shoulders bent, looking down at the red stain on the silver blade. It held her in a spell.

It shook at her feet, a silent, clamorous, blood-stained witness. It danced. It accused her, damned her—left her without defense.

She had gone to Carozzo armed with this dagger. She had been alone with him. She had seen him dead, bleeding. She had covered him with roses. She had come out of his den with this dagger in her sleeve—and it was covered with his blood.

She tried to wet her dry lips with her tongue; but her tongue was dry, too. It stuck to the roof of her dry mouth. She felt that she couldn't breathe, that she could not move nor look away from the dagger.

She didn't know how that blood had come on the silver blade. She did not remember dropping the weapon among the roses, did not remember picking it up. She didn't remember striking the blow that slew Carozzo—yet she must have struck it!

She heard her father's voice: "Say nothing!" It came from far away. It was meaningless, vague. It was false, impossible. It wasn't her father's voice.

Her father was in prison, serving life for a murder he did not commit. She had tried to save him. How hard she had tried! She had failed—failed woefully. And now she, too, would be tried for murder.

She felt that something was expected of her. She must say something, do something. What was it? These people were all in their places, in their proper rôles, women who hated her, men who loved her, policemen, newspaper men, the district attorney's man who had convicted her father. They were all expecting something of her.

She must keep looking at that hideous swaying thing, yet she could see all these people looking at her, waiting for her to act, to speak. Their faces were dull, stupid, questioning. She did not find that strange. Rather she found it strangely familiar, like a scene she had rehearsed with them long, long ago, and had forgotten. What must she do?

Ah, yes! She must open her eyes. The dagger would vanish then, and all these people. That was it. She must wake, and find herself at home in her white room. She must open her eyes and look at the clothes hanging in her closet, at Ted's picture standing by the lamp on the little stand by her pillow, at her books on the table.

That was it. She must wake herself. But she could not. The spell held her until she felt Ted and her father putting her in her chair. She looked from one face to the other, then felt them with her fingers.

They were real! This was actually happening to her!

She was in the Corsairs' Club. Carozzo was dead. Her dagger was sticking up from the wooden floor. She would be placed in a cell presently. She would be taken from these two men who loved her, and she would be alone in a cell.

These two were the ones who would suffer. These two, and her mother and her little sisters. One blow had not been enough for them. They must suffer more.

She heard her father's voice in her ear: "Steady! Steady! Don't give way." He was frightened, she saw, sick with fright.

A little while ago she had seen him walking into this room, strong, free, a proud man come mysteriously back from prison, shaking his white mane, smiling, lifting his head.

A little while ago! And now he was sick and old.

Her father, and all who loved her—they would suffer most. Ted might be put in prison with her—as her accomplice. Because he had tried to save her. Because he loved her. They would even try to make him testify against her!

She felt her father's hand on hers.

It shook. It was weak, without courage, without hope.

"Don't keep looking at that knife," Ted whispered. "And don't be afraid, Molly. Don't be afraid!"

She touched his hand lightly, then clung to it. She looked into his eyes. They were warm, comforting. They made her feel that nothing could harm her, nothing could frighten her.

She raised his hand quickly to her lips.