

CHAPTER XXXVII

"PLEASE take your seats, everybody." Platt's voice was curt. The policemen snapped into action. The reporters sat down and began to scribble furiously, one of them using the tablecloth for a writing pad. Platt looked at Marcia.

"You said Miss Sommers stabbed Big Joe Carozzo in the heart?"

"Yeah. I did."

"Why did you say it was in the heart?"

Molly saw the blood ebb out of Marcia's face.

"I seen her!" the girl said.

"Tell us about it." Platt was unexcited. His flat voice seemed to provoke the girl, though she tried not to show it.

"I was outside one of the windows, looking through the glass."

"Wasn't the glass covered with frost?"

"It was," Marcia said quickly. "But—but maybe my breath melted it. Anyhow, I could see her clear. I seen her kill him."

"But frost forms on the inside of the pane. You were outside, you say?"

"Yeah. I was outside, and I seen her."

"One moment." Platt whispered to a policeman who had come out of the den, sent him on an errand, and turned again to Marcia.

"Was that window locked or open, Miss Caponi?"

"It was—I don't remember that. All I know is I looked through the glass and——"

"Yes, yes. Maybe you're right. True, we found footprints outside one of those windows. They were made by some woman. They were going away from the window. They went around the roof, passed close to the place where they're putting the bridge across to the new building, and stopped at the entrance to the service bar."

Marcia looked at him vacantly but said nothing. She bent her head and stared at the floor.

Molly could see the girl's hands lying in her lap, palms up, fingers twitching. She had never seen Marcia like that before. She was Marcia, of course, with the many bracelets on her left forearm and a ring on every finger. But she was not the Marcia Molly had known. She was not the queen cobra at the moment. And she was always to remain in Molly's memory as she was then, sitting on a chair, watching her fingers twitch.

A police sergeant hurried out of the den. The door banged shut after him with a noise so loud that Marcia jumped. He rushed across the room, kicking a chair out of his way, and Platt leaped up and asked in a loud voice: "What's the matter?"

"Carozzo's not dead yet," the sergeant said. It seemed to the crowd he was trying to whisper, yet his voice was audible in the farthest corner of the room.

"Not dead?"

"The medical examiner says——" the sergeant began. He had no chance to say more. Marcia had shot from her chair, and was running toward him.

"Swear to God he isn't dead!" she cried. She fell on her knees and raised her hands to him. "Swear to God!"

Platt raised her up, led her back to her seat.

"We have only the sergeant's word for it," he said. "Sit down, please. I'm sorry I can't help you."

"Please let me go to him, Mr. Platt," she cried. "Let me go to him, won't you, please?"

She seized Platt's arms, looked into his face. Molly could see Platt steeling himself against the pity he must feel.

"Miss Caponi," he said, "if Carozzo is still alive, and conscious, as the sergeant says, we shall have a statement from him in a few minutes. In view of this—is there anything you wish to say? I must warn you again, however, that anything you say may be used against you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“I DIDN’T mean it,” Marcia said, weeping. “As God hears me, I didn’t.”

She ran her rings through her black hair. They glittered like fireflies in the night. She laughed. Her words came fast, shrill words, little words beating like frightened knuckles on a door, beating on the silence of the room.

“I was in the den. I was under the table when she came. I meant to kill her. He wanted to marry her, and I meant to kill her. How could I let her have him? The damn blonde gold digger! She didn’t love him. I loved him. He was mine. I was in the room all the time. Hiding. I had a knife.

“She went into the bedroom. She was afraid and ran. It was only Pio Mora, but she was afraid. She got away. I waited. I waited until Mora went. I got up. I thought she had come back. But he was alone. And—and it just happened. I didn’t mean to kill him. I loved him. How could I kill him?

“‘Joe,’ I said. He looked at me as if I was a worm. ‘What are you doing here, Snake Eyes?’ he said. He never called me that before. It made me mad. I said—I don’t know what I said. I know I begged him not to

marry her. I begged him not to kick me out. I told him how much I loved him. I told him I'd kill him. And her, too. He—he hit me. He knocked me down. Me! He knocked me down and laughed at me."

She was silent a moment, panting, running her rings through her hair.

"There was a rose. Lying on the floor it was. A red rose. I seen her playing with it—before she ran out. I seen where she stepped on it.

"I seen where her heel mashed it. He picked it up. I seen him. I seen him kiss it."

She threw up her head and laughed, looking at the high-beamed ceiling from which the black flags hung.

"Big Joe kissing a rose! Ain't it funny? Did you think Carozzo kissed roses? He kissed it. Like a sap. A dirty rose she stepped on!"

She threw herself on the chair, her forehead against its back, her arms around it, hugging it. Her shoulders shook, and her back, and the long black hair that covered her.

"I killed him," she said. Slowly she turned to face Geoffrey Platt. Slowly she lifted her face. Slowly she brushed the hair away from her eyes.

"I give him fair warning," she said. "Long ago! Long ago I told him I'd kill him. 'One more blonde,' I said, 'and I'll cut your heart out. I'll kill you and her both,' I said."

She laughed.

"He's dead," she said quietly, matter-of-factly. "You thought you fooled me with your cheap trick, didn't you? Like hell you fooled me!"

Her voice rose a note or two, fell away again.

"I put the knife into his dirty rotten heart—as far in as it would go. I seen him die. With his rose in his hand. And I laughed at him. I spit in his face. 'Keep your damn rose,' I said. 'It should of been a lily,' I said. And so I beat it. You thought you could fool me? God, that's good. I turned the knife in his heart, and I beat it."

She lay back on the chair, inert, head hanging, mouth open, tongue moving slowly out and in, out and in, bosom rising and falling slowly, painfully. Her eyes stared at nothing, unwinking black eyes. Her hands rested in her lap, palms up. Her fingers twitched.

So she remained until they led her away.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"GENTLEMEN," Platt addressed the reporters, "when I spoke to you some little time ago of righting a great wrong I had no idea that Carozzo was to be stabbed, and that Miss Sommers was to be suspected of the crime.

"I needed no help in establishing the proof of guilt in this crime, thanks to the good work of Captain O'Malley and his men. Detective Sergeants Mannix and Moffett found a knife which we easily identified as Miss Caponi's. It was in the snow near the edge of the roof.

"They've started a bridge from this building, you know, to the one across the street. The workmen have temporarily removed the top of the fire escape. It was in the way. The part of the fire escape they removed lies about twenty feet from the bridge. And it was at this point the knife was found."

He glanced at a sheet of paper on which was some sort of diagram, and passed it to the reporters.

"Captain O'Malley has had this sketch made for you. You will note that the footprints pass close to the spot where the knife was found. It is marked with

a circle, I believe. I may remark that we found in the dressing room a pair of slippers that fitted the foot-prints. They were wet, and there was a little snow still on them. They were Miss Caponi's.

"No doubt, for a moment you believed Miss Sommers was guilty of this crime. The direct accusation, the falling of her dagger, the fact that she had been in Carozzo's room—these and other things tended to incriminate her. Had it not been for Miss Caponi's confession it might be she would have gone to trial, charged with murder.

"But the wrong I spoke of, gentlemen, was the wrong done to Anthony Sommers."

He smiled at Sommers, and at Anson Keen.

"Anthony Sommers was tried and convicted by my friend Mr. Keen for the murder of one Spots Larkin, whose real name was Pietro Bonofiglio. He was sentenced to Sing Sing penitentiary for from twenty years to life. And he was an innocent man. I propose to prove it to you this morning."

He sat back, evidently enjoying the faces he saw before him.

"You have seen how circumstances almost entrapped an innocent girl," he went on, thumbing a sheaf of papers. "You will see how diabolically they did entrap her father. And when you have seen, I know you will do him justice."

He spoke to the stenographer. The stenographer spoke to a policeman, and presently four men came

out of the den, carrying spindles. Platt arranged them in a row. Forty of them.

"Please observe these spindles," he said. "Forty. I think that is all of them, is it not, Mr. Mora?"

Mora cleared his throat but made no reply.

"No, there is one more," Platt said. He took it from a brown-paper package handed to him by the stenographer, and held it up. "Forty-one," he said.

The stenographer opened another package, and disclosed a plumber's blow torch. He lit it. A blue flame leaped out of it. Chairs were edged nearer. Nobody spoke until Platt held up a spindle for attention.

"This particular spindle," he said, "was the one thrown at Mr. Morehouse in this room yesterday morning. I took it out of the table top because I was curious. I wondered why a spindle with such a heavy base as this, and such a comparatively light shaft, could have been thrown so it would land point first. It seemed to me that the base, being heavier, would strike the table rather than the point.

"However, I was deceived, for the base of this spindle is light. It is light because it is hollow. Yet all these other spindles"—he took the one nearest to him, held its bottom to the blue flame for a moment, and watched the lead melt—"all these other spindles have heavy bases. They are filled with——"

A sparkling rain fell out of the spindle base and lay on the table. Diamonds!

Platt melted the bottom of another spindle. Another heap of diamonds fell from it.

"Gentlemen, I venture so say there is more than half a million dollars' worth of stolen jewels in these spindles!"

He scooped the diamonds into a little heap.

"Mora," he said, "you carved all the figures on these spindles. You did it to mark each particular one, did you not?"

Again Mora cleared his throat. Again he held his tongue.

"You need not answer unless you wish," Platt assured him. "But I know that you, and others, have more jewels hidden in this place than we will find in the bases of these spindles. Carozzo had a belt of diamonds on him when he died. I know where some of these stones came from. I know some of the thieves concerned. Most of them are under arrest. Several of them have already made statements to Mr. Keen."

Again he turned to the reporters.

"This is merely incidental, gentlemen," he said. "You must have known that Carozzo was one of the biggest bootleggers in the country. You must have known that he was a sort of feudal lord, with an army of gunmen and sluggers at his command. You must have known that he was concerned in most of the gang killings in New York and near-by cities. Don't be surprised that he was also the head of an army of jewel thieves. Jewels were Carozzo's mania.

"Big Joe Carozzo made millions of dollars by smuggling liquor into this country, and by selling it. He had his own fleet, his own trucks. He has bribed hundreds of men sworn to uphold the law. He paid out millions in bribes.

"When he could not bribe a man he had him killed—or framed. He got rid of him in some way.

"My history of Carozzo's activities is not at all complete. It goes back only as far as his Chinese smuggling days—when he would take a boatload of Chinamen, agree to smuggle them into Florida or the Carolinas at a thousand dollars a head, and throw them overboard.

"There was no risk in this, and vast profits. The agents who supplied his passengers were well paid. The Chinese never landed, so there was no charge of smuggling laid against Carozzo. If any inquiry started it was easy to say that an epidemic had broken out among the Chinamen, and killed them all, and he was forced to bury them at sea.

"At the same time he was smuggling liquor, and doing a bit of hijacking. I have a well-authenticated instance of this. Perhaps Mr. Mora can tell me if I am wrong."

He shuffled the papers before him, drew out one, scanned it, read it aloud, looking in Mora's direction.

"The barkentine *Sea Fly*. Captured by Carozzo 200 miles off Montauk Point, Sept. 18, 1919. Captain and crew shot, and thrown overboard. Dominick Dugo, alias

'Spaghetti,' machine gunner on Carozzo's vessel, now in San Quentin prison serving life for murder, willing to talk for a consideration."

"Of thees I know nothing," Mora shouted. "Of thees I have not heard. All thees ees lies. Beeg damn lies."

Platt gave a signal, and a detective standing behind Mora put the barrel of his revolver to the back of Mora's neck.

"Search him," said Platt.

Theresa screamed something in Italian. She tried to get out of her chair, but strong hands held her down; and a detective who spoke her idiom quieted her.

The search revealed no weapon; and Mora was allowed to sit down.

Platt seemed to ignore Mora for a moment. He shuffled his papers again.

"So we come," he said, "to the night of the murder of Spots Larkin, and the conviction of Anthony Sommers.

"I have lost an important witness; and so you must take my word for what I tell you. This witness was a girl who used to sell cigarettes here. Many of you knew her. Her name was Monica Lane."

Molly sat forward in her seat. At last she was going to find out the mystery of Monica Lane, the mystery of the Larkin murder.

"When Larkin came to this club he came with a diamond that has no price. It was quite a big diamond,

He and another crook had stolen it from a private home. He intended to sell it to Carozzo. I had received information of this, and I determined to get that stone.

"I was sitting at this very table, with my friend Mr. Keen, when Larkin came in. I saw him there at the door, talking to Carozzo and Anthony Sommers. Marcia Caponi had gone up to the balcony before they entered the door. Her testimony at the trial, therefore, was, of course, untrue.

"I saw these three men there. I saw Monica Lane. I signalled her, and she knew what to do. I had already given her instructions. She went at once into the den, and waited.

"She told me later what happened there. Check me up, Mr. Mora, if I am wrong."

The scar leaped out on Mora's face—the only sign that he had heard.

"Sommers came into the den with Larkin. They sat at a table. Sommers had a little bottle of whisky. They began to drink. Monica Lane approached them, with her basket of cigarettes. She took part in their conversation, and, as I had instructed her, proffered a package of cigarettes to Larkin. 'Try them,' she said. 'They're a new brand.' Larkin took a cigarette, and, I suppose simply to humour the girl, Anthony Sommers asked for one.

"I had instructed Miss Lane to give these cigarettes to no one but Larkin. But, under the circum-

stances, I suppose she felt justified in doing as she did. She held a match and lit both cigarettes."

Platt looked at Sommers, gave him a rueful smile.

"You have guessed, of course," he said, "that these cigarettes were especially prepared. In a moment both you and Larkin were apparently asleep. Miss Lane took your cigarettes, threw them into a cuspidor, searched Larkin's pockets until she found the diamond. She replaced it with a piece of glass I had given her, left the room by one of those French windows, and came directly to my table.

"You wonder, no doubt, why I didn't have Larkin arrested. I had come here more or less prepared for that. Mr. Keen was with me. It would have been a simple thing to have claimed that stone, to have proved it was stolen—but I had no time for that. I had to take that diamond to Paris, to take it there at the earliest possible moment. I will tell you why, later. I was not a deputy police commissioner then. I had no authority as such until yesterday, when I told the commissioner everything. He decided then that I should handle the case in my own way, and gave me full power to do so. I decided to make the arrests to-night, not only because Mr. Sommers had just returned to New York, but for another excellent reason."

Molly thought she knew what that reason was. She gave Platt a grateful look. Platt smiled. and looked at Mora.

“Monica Lane, when she put that diamond in my hand,” he said, “told me that as she was going around the roof Pio Mora passed her. She watched him, saw him go in through the window she had left open. Now, Mr. Mora—have you anything you wish to say to us?”

“I talk,” said Mora. “I talk now!”