

CHAPTER XL

"I TELL you everything, you let me hold Joe hees han' unteel he die!" Mora shouted.

Platt shook his head.

"Carozzo's dead," he said.

"Dead? Joe ees dead?"

He did not seem to understand.

"You tell Snake Eyes—you tell her he ees make talk to your men. You tell her he ees not dead. She say she keel heem. I theenk she ees crez girl."

"It seemed necessary at the time," Platt said. "I knew she was lying, you see. I had to shock her into telling the truth, because she had accused another person of the murder. And I did not want that innocent girl to be placed in jail for even one moment. You understand?"

"Carozz'—he's dead!"

Mora's great hands went to his flaming moustaches—as Carozzo's used to leap to his black sharp points.

"And me—you put me in thees chair? Yes, no? You theenk I keel thees Larkin?"

"Tell your story if you want to. I can't promise you any immunity, remember."

"I talk."

He hitched his chair up a little nearer to Platt's table. He made a gesture of resignation with his hands.

"Ees true, what you say. I went into the den through French weendow. I see Sommers and Larkin. They are asleep, I theenk. I feel careful through thees Larkin's pockets. So! I have found the fake stone. I look at it. I hold it thees way, I hold it that way. I hold it to the light. She ees still a fake. I go through hees pockets again. Nothing. Only the fake.

"I leeve queek. Larkin he ees greep the table with hees hands. Thees way. Tight."

He illustrated for Platt's benefit, clutching the edge of the table, leaning forward in his chair.

"Sommers he ees sit back, with hees hands falling. So! He make some move. So! I theenk he is wake up. I put my hand on hees face. Lika thees, no? I geef a leetla push. Hees nose bleed. So. I no lika thees, and so I go queek through the weendow, and I find Carozz'.

"I give Carozz' the phony stone, and he swear like anything. He ees theenk Larkin geef heem the doubla-cross. He swear to keei him. He ees swear to cut Larkin hees throat—but I have better way.

"'Let me take thees phony stone,' I say. 'Let me take thees so clumsy fake. I feex him. I break heem here, I break heem there. I break off leetla bit on thees side, leetla bit on that. So, thees fake she have sharp edges, for cut a man's insides.

“‘He shall eat thees fake stone,’ I tell Carozz’. ‘He shall eat thees cut glass. In leetla while it begin to cut. It cut inside heem, where nobody see. Nobody blame us, eh? Nobody say Carozz’ he keel thees man.’”

Platt stopped his calm recital.

“Wait,” he said. “You took this stone, this fake stone, upstairs, to your laboratory, did you not? You fixed it up there, and then brought it down?”

“Correct! I put heem in the vise, and I chip heem here, and I chip heem there. I make good fine job. So. I breeng heem down to Carozz’. I breeng down, too, the leetla pieces I have chip off.

“I breeng them down. But firs’ I smash the leetla pieces with the hammer. I make them fine nice dust. I meex thees dust in my chewing gum. And I put the chewing gum around these fake stone.

“Now the stone can go down easy to Larkin hees stomach. Thees gum——” He paused.

“The gum would dissolve in Larkin’s stomach? Is that what you wanted to say?”

Mora bowed to Platt, smiled at him politely.

“Correct!” he said. “The gum ees dissolve. And the leetla powder glass, and the so sharp edges of the fake stone I have feex, they cut leetla bit here, leetla bit there. And so thees Larkin he suffer whole lot for doubla-cross Carozz’. No, yes?”

“Go on,” said Platt.

Mora looked around him, as though he expected

applause for his cleverness. He appeared to sulk when he found none.

“So we go back in the den,” he said. “We go in by the weindow. And Larkin he is ver’ dead. Already the speendle stick out from hees throat. My ver’ bes’ speendle!”

“Then for God’s sake who did kill Larkin?”

It was Anthony Sommers who asked the question. He was on his feet, glaring at Mora, shaking his lion’s mane.

Mora made a gesture with his hands.

“That I don’ know,” he shouted.

CHAPTER XLI

“Go on!” said Geoffrey Platt.

Anthony Sommers turned to him quickly.

“I humbly ask your pardon, Mr. Platt,” he said. “I quite forgot myself for the moment, hearing this man talk.”

“It is quite all right,” said Platt. He waited until Sommers had reseated himself by his daughter.

“Go on,” he said again.

“So!” Mora said. “We are there in the den, Larkin with the speendle sticking out from the back of hees neck, Sommers with hees nose bleed, me, and Carozz’. Carozz’ he ees ver’ mad. He swear lika everything. He throw the gum diamond in the basket.

“‘Somebodee has keel heem already,’ Carozz’ he complain. ‘Keel heem with mucha blood. It is no good! Thees Keen he ees in next room. He blame me, yes, no? Maybe not. Maybe he blame Sommers.’

“Me, I pull back Larkin hees head for make sure he ees dead. I put my hand in hees hair, and pull him back on the chair. For sure he ees dead. I am disgus’. I push heem back. I drink beeg drink of wheesky.

“Carozz’ he ees search Sommers’ pockets. He find thees handkerchief, and he dip it in thees blood. So!

He lay it on top of thees wastebasket. So! Nice, fine, it look. Any cop can see.”

Mora looked at O'Malley, who had come out of the den and was standing behind Platt. He grinned. The captain scowled in return.

“Carozz’ he not satisfied by thees,” Mora went on. “He ees send me for gun. I ask Theresa. She geeve me the gun and I come back and put the gun in Larkin hees coat pocket.”

Theresa screamed at him, in Italian. Her face was a picture of fury. He said something to her. She looked sharply at the detectives standing at either side of her chair, and was silent.

“Go on,” said Platt.

“Carozz’,” said Mora, grinning now at Sommers, “he want to keel Sommers, too. He ees scare’. ‘Thees man ees a devil,’ he say. ‘We no keel heem he no go to jail. We keel heem Meester Keen he theenk Larkin keel heem.’ He look for knife for cut Sommers hees throat. But I no lika that.

“‘Sommers,’ I tell heem, ‘he ees dead man already. New Yorka State ees keel heem dead in leetla electric chair.’ But Carozz’ he don’ believe until he see Sommers fall from hees chair.

“‘Ees good!’ he say then. ‘We make it look like he ees try to run away.’”

“So you and Carozzo carried him out on the roof between you, and left him lying there near the fire escape?” Platt asked.

"Ees correct!" said Mora proudly. "Flat Wheel, he help. So!"

"But how about the receipts that were found on the spindles?"

"Receipts?"

"The receipts that had been on the spindles—the papers Sergeant Hanson found in the basket."

Mora shrugged his shoulders.

"I don' know. Whoever he keel Larkin put those papers in the basket."

"They were on the crucifix spindle?"

"Ees correct!"

Platt searched among the spindles on his table until he found the one with the crucifix. He studied it, weighed it.

"Light," he said.

"The unfilled spindles were simply spindles, I suppose," Keen said. "The others were jewel cases."

"Is that right, Mora?" Platt asked.

"Correct!"

"You called this your best spindle. Was it because you had done your best work on it? Or because it was destined to receive the greatest treasure?"

"I make it nice," Mora answered. "I make it my bes' work because Carozz' he say he put those ruby in it. But—we no have time for thees."

"You mean the ruby necklace that was stolen here yesterday?"

Mora threw out his arms in a gesture of despair, and his scar winked balefully.

"Oh, if I find thees man who steal those ruby!" he said.

Platt looked at him for some moments, seeming reluctant to let him go. He turned to Anthony Sommers.

"Is there anything you want to ask him?" he said.

Sommers stood up. He walked toward Mora's chair—as he had walked toward the witness chair thousands of times before.

"I should like to ask about those gum wrappers," he said. "During the trial I tried to get some information from Sergeant Hanson as to the various objects he found in the wastebasket. But the good sergeant was confused. He didn't know whether the gum wrappers were on the top or the bottom of the basket. Apparently he didn't think it mattered. He didn't know where he found the wad of gum with the glass in it. He couldn't relocate the receipts. All he knew was that my handkerchief was on the top of the basket, and everything else was underneath it somewhere.

"You have said, Pio, in your diffident, shy way, that the gummed diamond must have been just beneath the handkerchief. You have said that the spindle was cleaned of its receipts before you came into the room. Therefore the receipts must have been under the gum.

"Now—where were the gum wrappers? Were they beneath the receipts, or on top of them?"

"I don' know."

Sommers was not disappointed.

"You did not throw them there?"

"No."

"You did not take out a package of gum while you were begging Carozzo not to cut my throat? You didn't chew gum while framing me, I hope?"

"No. I no chew gum at thees time."

"By the way—you say Carozzo took a handkerchief out of my pocket. I just happened to have one of my own. Your wife sends out the handkerchiefs with the laundry. She distributes them when they return ironed. She could have given him one of mine, couldn't she?"

Mora smiled and pulled out a handkerchief—"Thees one is yours too," he said.

Sommers said easily, "That's all," and walked to his seat. How easily his court-room manners had come back to him, Molly thought. How fine he was again, how well and strong and capable.

Sommers smiled at her, and then at the newspaper men.

"It may be well here," he said, "to right another wrong, gentlemen."

He stood in front of the press table, looking down the line of reporters.

"I remember some of you were at my trial. You

were. And you were. You were there during one afternoon session. You—you weren't there? I thought not.

"You will remember that I asked Captain O'Malley about the egg on his vest. I want to explain now that this was purely a rhetorical question. It was meant to get the captain's goat—and give me a chance to build up my defense. I never saw any egg on the captain's vest. I don't believe there ever was any egg on it. Will you put that in your stories?"

"You bet," said Retticker. "But—but why aren't you in jail?"

"We'll answer all your questions in a little while," said Platt. "And don't forget to mention, gentlemen, that Captain O'Malley has forgiven Mr. Sommers, and Mr. Sommers has forgiven the captain. And don't forget that O'Malley has been working night and day on this case—and that he has done much to solve the murder of Spots Larkin."

"But it isn't solved!"

It was Anson Keen who spoke.

"It will be solved before we leave," Platt said. "Bring in Chet Qug."

CHAPTER XLII

MOLLY did not believe Chet Qug had had any part in the murder of Spots Larkin—though she realized Platt had summoned him for questioning. He must have some good reason for it. She would wait patiently to find out what it was. There were so many things she must wait for!

“Ted,” she whispered, “you did fire a shot, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“But—did you fire at him? Did you see Marcia there? Did you come after she left? Did you——”

“Whoa!” he said, smiling at her.

“I can’t help asking questions.”

“Molly, I climbed that skyscraper next door—with a cop after me. I talked him into helping me. We rigged up a sort of bridge over the street. And I jumped onto the roof.”

“Ted! And you were not frightened?”

“I was never so scared in my life—until I got used to it. There was one ladder that added years to my life—I’ll never be young again.”

“You jumped!”

"It was nothing. I'd jump over the moon for you."

"You jumped! On that gravel roof. And you in your stocking feet!"

"Ah, but I didn't land on my feet."

They smiled at each other.

"And I didn't fall on gravel, Molly. I fell on some steel plates, and slid. They were covered with ice and snow."

"But the shot, Ted——"

"Oh, yes. I tried to get into the elevator downstairs, and when I came out of that argument I was going to the lockup with the cop—and I found a gun in my pocket. They had tried to frame me. I had the gun jammed into the band of my trousers when I landed on the roof.

"I had it in my hand when I came into the den—I bet Platt has my footprints on that map the reporters are looking at. Well—you can imagine how numb my hands were. They didn't feel like hands at all.

"Molly, when that shot went off I was more scared than anybody in the world. I didn't see anybody in that room. And there I was blazing away at the wall. Platt saw that bullet hole as soon as he opened the door. I could see him looking at it."

"Ted Morehouse—you were going to kill Carozzo!"

"I was. Rather than see you——"

"Don't," she said.

For a long moment they looked at each other, satisfied at what they saw, glad.

"Molly," her father whispered, "everybody's looking at you. Especially the reporters."

She laughed.

"And how they're aching to get away and write about you!" she said. "In a little while all the tickers will be boiling like coffee in newspaper offices all over the country. In a little while boys will be running through the streets in the big cities, in the little towns, crying 'Anthony Sommers Innocent.' Aren't you thrilled?"

He arched his eyebrows and stared at her.

"And Bill Edens will print your picture on the front page," she added. She began taking off her heavy coat. Ted helped her.

"How do you know so much about newspapers?" Anthony Sommers asked.

"I'll tell you later," she said. "There's Qug!"

Chet Qug was staring at her. He stood before Platt's table, his back turned to Platt, and there was a bewildered look on his face.

"Geez!" he said. "Eileen Drew! What's it all about?"

"Mr. Qug!"

Qug wheeled.

"And you're the commissioner of police! Geez! My pal the boss cop of the town. What's it all about?"

"Sit down, Chet. I simply want to ask you a few questions. You were here yesterday morning. You

probably know who threw this spindle at Mr. Morehouse."

"Of course I do. But, Geez! you don't think I'm goin' to squeal, do you? I ain't no cop, Geoff."

"Chet, very serious consequences attend on your telling. Eileen Drew, it turns out, is Molly Sommers, the daughter of Anthony Sommers. She came to this cabaret to find out who framed her father. She thought Carozzo and Pio Mora knew—and so she let them make love to her, hoping to catch them off their guard and make them talk. It didn't work, as you know.

"We have proved this morning that Anthony Sommers did not kill Larkin."

"Geez. Everybody knows he was framed. Why don't you put the screws on Big Joe? I don't know anything. And even if I did—I ain't no canary, and I don't sing. Sec?"

"Carozzo's dead."

"The hell you say! Well—all right. I told him I'd croak him. Go on. Ask me something. But you ain't goin' to railroad me."

Platt laughed at him gently.

"Don't worry, Chet. Marcia killed him. She made a confession. What I'm trying to get at now is who killed Larkin? And I think if you can tell us who threw the spindle at Morehouse, we can find out who thrust the other spindle into Larkin's neck."

"Well, have you sprung Sommers?"

"He's never been in jail."

"And I never been in a fight. Come clean with me, Geoff Platt. What do you mean, he's never been in jail?"

"Just that," said Platt.

"But it don't make sense."

Platt smiled at him, and then at the newspaper reporters.

"You boys are going to have a full newspaper written before you get out of here," he said. "I thought I'd get this over quick and then supply all the details. But Mr. Qug needs proof.

"Anthony Sommers never went to Sing Sing because he was pardoned by the governor immediately after his sentence.

"You see, Chet, I knew Sommers was innocent—not only because I took the diamond from Spots Larkin, but because Sommers was drugged. I sailed to Europe with the diamond as soon as I could. I had to leave Sommers to his fate, but I trusted in his ability. I thought he could easily get a jury to acquit him. But he insisted on telling the truth—and that convicted him.

"I came back to New York while the jury was still considering his fate. I was fortunate at finding my brother here."

"The senator, eh?"

"Yes, the senator. Together we went to the court room. We got there just as Sommers was being

sentenced. We went directly into the judge's chambers. We took Mr. Keen with us. We explained everything to him and to the judge. We, the four of us, got in touch with the governor. He happened to be at the Biltmore. The pardon was signed in half an hour, and the prison authorities and the parole officers and others who might talk were cautioned to keep silence until we had an opportunity to ferret out the truth. The warden at Sing Sing was instructed to say that Sommers was in the hospital, and that no one was allowed to see him. Mr. Sommers wanted exoneration, naturally, but said he preferred to wait until we could prove his innocence before we made it public.

"To make it simpler Mr. Sommers went abroad with my father."

"Yes," said Sommers, laughing. "We bought a couple of raincoats and went to Portland, Oregon. Later we spent some time in Japan."

"Mr. Sommers is one of my father's most capable attorneys now," Platt said.

"I pass," said Qug. He turned and looked at Sommers, gave him a nod, and smiled at Molly.

"Geez, Eileen," he said. "I'm—I'm glad. I always said you were the squarest dame that ever hit the street. Didn't I?"

Platt's question swung him around again.

"Who threw that spindle?"

"As long as Sommers is sprung," Qug answered, "what difference does it make?"

"You won't tell?"

"Am I a rat?"

He stood up, kicking back his chair. He looked about the room, at the newspaper men, the detectives, at Theresa and Mora and Mickey Finn, at Molly and Ted and Anthony Sommers, at the waiter who was known as Flat Wheel.

"I can send a guy to the chair," he said slowly. "And you think I'll do it? Why? Because he killed a louse like that wop Larkin? Hell! Let the grand wopera go on doin' their own killin'. I won't chirp."

"All right," said Platt. "You may go now."

"Keep the change."

Oug shook hands with Molly.

"You're goin' to marry the big guy, kid?" he asked.

"As soon as possible," Molly said, for all the room to hear.

"Atta baby!"

He shook hands with Ted, too.

"Boy, you better take that kid out of New York," he said. "There's a couple of news hounds over there, there's Platt, the millionaire cop, there's that guy Mora you plunked so pretty the other night—and there's me—all of us downhearted. Good luck—and for the love of lucre, the next time you fight a guy, don't lead with your right."