

CHAPTER XLIII

"NICE playful leopard, your pal Qug," Deputy District Attorney Keen observed in a whisper. "Squarest dame in New York, eh? Everything is superlative in New York. The tallest building, the most celebrated lawyer, the most eligible bachelor, the most—— She's a gazelle, Geoff, a bird of paradise. She—— Oh, as your friend says, I pass. Let's get on with the circus."

"The rabbit, the tiger, and the weasel," said Platt, amused.

"And the goose! You may get something from the others, but all you'll get from her is a goose egg."

"Captain O'Malley," Platt called, "manacle these three men. They've been searched. No—sorry! Only Mora has been searched."

Mora and the waiter held out their wrists for the cuffs, but Finn objected.

"What right have you got to hold me?" he asked. His little red eyes burned in his pasty face.

"Never mind the right," said O'Malley. The steel bracelets clicked. "Now let's see what kind of a rod you got on you. Stand up!"

Deftly the police officer's hands made their search.

He found a pearl-handled automatic in Finn's dinner coat.

"Ah, hah!" he said, his bulldog face all smiles. "What right have I got, you say? Siddown!"

Molly wondered if Finn were wearing his elbow guns. Apparently not, since O'Malley hadn't found them. No, he couldn't be wearing them now—that's why he had the other gun. She looked at his loose wide sleeves. If he did have his guns— She was tempted to whisper something to Platt about the matter, thought better of it.

"Gum and a gun," O'Malley said.

He poured three handfuls of gum packages into a handkerchief, and brought them to Platt's desk.

"The greatest gum chewer in New York," he said. Keen snickered and winked at Platt.

O'Malley now searched Aiello. Aiello was frightened. His nostrils quivered. And he blushed.

The captain took from one pocket a piece of cake wrapped in a napkin, from another pocket a bottle of olive oil, half full. There were salted nuts and raisins in other pockets, lumps of sugar, a stick of celery, a chicken sandwich in oiled paper.

O'Malley chuckled.

"Well, you won't starve where you're going, anyway," he said, snapping the handcuffs on the shaking wrists. "Siddown. It ain't lunch time yet."

Solemnly O'Malley placed on Platt's table the contents of the waiter's pockets.

"I let them keep their dough," he said, "so they won't be saying later that I robbed them."

"Thank you, Captain," Platt said. "Gentlemen, I think it is time now to explain about the diamond you have described as 'the Larkin diamond.'"

He played with the packages of gum, as he had seen Mickey Finn play with them, built log houses of them, knocked them down, built them up again, seemed absorbed in the play.

"As a matter of fact, the jewel in question belonged to a Belgian family. There is a legend concerning it, mythical probably, but interesting nevertheless.

"The story is that the diamond came into the possession of this family at the time Cæsar invaded Belgium. One of those ancient *Belgæ*—'*fortissimi sunt Belgæ*,' Cæsar wrote of them—spared the life of a Roman officer he had wounded, and was given the diamond as a token of gratitude. Probably mythical, as I said. The Belgian may have killed the Roman and stolen the jewel. I don't know.

"The story goes on to tell how the mercy shown by the Belgian—the mercy and the courage, I should say—went into the diamond and remained there, to bless all those who rightfully wore it. The first Belgian hero gave it to his son, and became the grandfather of a great soldier.

"At any rate, this stone has come down through countless years to the eldest sons in the De Mournay family. The father has given it to the son upon his

wedding day. The son has given it to his wife—and she has always—so the legend goes—borne a child who grew to be a distinguished man. It is known as the '*Fortissimi*' diamond.

“During the war the Count Jules de Mournay, the elder, was impoverished. The Germans overran his property, worked his coal mines, occupied his châteaux, left him nothing but his personal possessions. Among these, of course, was the diamond.

“After the war he found it impossible to work his mines. He could not pay wages. His châteaux had been burned, his orchards cut down, his fields ruined, his livestock stolen. He must get money, much money. And he could get it only by pledging his fabulous diamond.

“Fortunately——”

Platt paused, and the gum house he had built fell and was scattered.

“This is a very delicate subject, gentlemen,” he said. “I had hoped that I might avoid touching on it. But I see no way out but to tell the truth of it, and trust to your discretion.”

He built up the packages of gum and went on, staring at them.

“Of course you know,” he said at length, “that I am related by marriage to the De Mournays. My sister Eleanor is the wife of the present head of that house, the young Count Jules.

“At the time of which I speak, however, the young

people had not met. The older count came to this city. He came to my father with the diamond. And my father was able to help him.

"My father did not want the diamond as security. He would have been satisfied to take the old man's notes. He had visited the count's estates some years before the war. He had seen the count's mines. He knew that the count would be able, in due time, to repay the loan with interest.

"But Count Jules insisted that my father keep the diamond, explaining that he, the count, would thus have a greater incentive to restore his fortunes than if he were merely attempting to repay a loan."

Mickey Finn interrupted.

"My throat's dry," he said. "Give me a stick of that gum, for God's sake."

Heedless of him, Platt continued:

"My father kept the diamond. He had a duplicate made of it. And he put both the original and the duplicate in the safe of our home in Larchmont!

"All barbers, I guess, are bald. My father is a railroad man, but he is also a banker. He owns safety vaults. He advertises their safety as the bald-headed barber advertises his hair tonics. He is proud of their burglar-proof qualities. And so—and so he put this priceless diamond in a little old safe in his home, and left it there.

"I was in this city when I learned of my sister's engagement. My father wrote me of it, and asked me

to come at once to Paris and to bring with me the *Fortissimi* diamond. I went at once to Larchmont. The safe had been opened. The diamond was gone—with other jewels.”

“For God’s sake! Just one little piece of gum!”

Platt smiled at Mickey Finn, but it was a smile that had no humour in it.

“In a little while—perhaps,” he said, and turned away from him. “I cabled my father,” he continued. “I told him I would come as soon as it was possible. And I set to work to find the diamond. I hired detectives, men and women. I hired crooks and set them to watching other crooks. I had several of them in Carozzo’s spaghetti joint in the Village. I had several in other dives.

“Of course we had tried to find finger prints of the thieves. There were none. We had no clues whatever until I learned that a man known as Spots had a diamond he wanted to sell, a diamond he said was ‘as big as a coconut.’

“It took us a week to locate Spots. It took several days to learn that he was negotiating with Carozzo. And on the night of May 14th I learned that he would come to this cabaret, with the diamond in his possession.”

One of the packages with which Platt was toying broke. A white powder spilled out of it.

“Cocaine,” he said. “I thought so. You want cocaine, Mickey, not gum.”

"Yes," Finn said. He began to shake. He seemed to shrivel, sitting there in his chair. Molly could not look at him.

"You not only use cocaine," Platt said, "but you have peddled it, too. You peddled it as gum. Pio Mora used to sell it concealed in banana skins."

"Ees all lie!" said Mora, without lifting his head. His voice was so low that Molly scarcely heard it.

"On the night of May 14th, Mickey, I found the Larkin diamond that you and your pal, Spots Larkin, stole from my father's house."

"You got nothing on me," Finn snarled, his wrists jerking so that the steel cuffs bit into his flesh. His legs shook. His face was contorted. His little red-rimmed eyes seemed to beg for mercy; but his teeth threatened like fangs.

"Didn't I say that man was a weasel?" Anson Keen whispered.

Platt walked close to Finn, a gum package in his hand.

"Give me it," Finn begged. He stretched out his queer long arms. "I did crack your lousy box. I copped the stone. What more do you want?"

"You stole the rubies, too, did you not?"

"Yes."

"You sold them to Carozzo?"

"Are you going to torture me all night? Yes. I sold them to him, damn him—and he cheated me."

With despair he saw Platt put the gum back in his

pocket. He began to curse, to rage. Two policemen held him in his chair. Platt waited until he began again to plead.

"This is the necklace, is it not?" he asked, holding it up in front of him.

Molly gasped. Her necklace! How had Platt recovered it? Her necklace? Certainly not. It was Platt's. She wondered if all the jewellery Carozzo had given her had been stolen—the pendant, the earrings he had rolled out on the glass top of his desk an hour ago.

She wished Babe were present. She smiled, thinking of what Babe would probably say when she learned:

"I was gonna say! You worked so hard for all that ice, Dearie, and now you gotta put it back. A girl don't ever get a break in this racket, does she?"

"Yes," Finn shouted, "that's the necklace. I wish I never seen it. Please, for God's sake, give me a snifter, Mr. Platt. Just a little snifter. I'm all shot to hell. Can't you see how I need it?"

CHAPTER XLIV

PLATT poured a stream of powder onto the back of one of Finn's shaking hands. The gum wrapper floated to the floor as he sniffed. Anthony Sommers jumped at the sight of it, and Platt said quickly:

"You took a sniff or two before you killed your pal, Spots Larkin, didn't you?"

Finn straightened, seemed to grow taller. His face changed. His legs and arms stopped jerking. He laughed.

"You got nothing on me," he said again.

Platt put away the rubies and took from his vest pocket a little card. He held it up before the prisoner.

"Ever seen it before?" he asked.

Finn blinked but said nothing. Platt turned to O'Malley.

"It seems," he said, "that Finn must have mistaken the duplicate for the real diamond. I admit it had more sparkle to it. So he gave to Larkin the thing he thought was a duplicate—and he sold the other in a pawnshop. I'll bet he was surprised when he found it wasn't worth over fifty dollars. I'll bet you kicked yourself, didn't you, Mickey?"

"I don't get you," O'Malley said. "If he sold the duplicate in a pawnshop, how come you had it to put in Larkin's pocket?"

"He did sell it," Platt explained. "The thing I put in Larkin's pocket wasn't the duplicate of the *Fortissimi* diamond—it was just a piece of glass I had a jeweller make for me. Call it a decoy, if you will."

"And he wrote his name on the pawnbroker's card, eh?"

"Not his own name—but it's in his handwriting. I've got three experts who will swear to that."

"I see it now," said O'Malley. "He gave away the real diamond by mistake, and when he found out what he had done he was mad enough to murder. He moseyed into the den to take it away from Larkin. And when he found Larkin had nothing at all—he croaked him. I'll be damned!"

"Try and prove it," Finn challenged.

Platt turned to Anson Keen.

"Mr. Keen," he said, "will you please tell Mickey Finn what you have discovered on those gum wrappers that were found by Sergeant Hanson in the wastebasket?"

"With pleasure," said Keen. "We found some particles of cocaine, and a number of finger prints. I have the report of the finger-print experts here somewhere, if you want it, all about whorls and loops and stuff like that. Very technical. Shall I read it?"

"No, please don't," said Platt. "We're all tired,

and I dare say a bit hungry—and these reporters want to get out of here sometime. Keep them here all day and they'll never write a story at all. Just tell us whose finger prints you found on those wrappers."

"Mickey Finn's," said Keen. "There are four or five perfectly developed prints."

"And the photographs of finger prints on the spindle—you have examined those, too?"

"Are you going to make me reveal all the State's evidence?"

"I am."

"But, Geoff——"

"You didn't reveal much of your evidence against Anthony Sommers, you will remember," Platt reminded him. "You convicted him—and he was innocent. I think you can afford to let Mr. Finn see what you have against him before we ask him to make a confession. Don't you?"

"I don't—but this is your party. And if you want it—here it is. We found two prints on the spindle base—that is on the photograph of the spindle base—two prints made by Anthony Sommers, rather blurred, but they were sufficiently plain for us to identify them. Three prints made by the fingers of Pio Mora. Two made by Carozzo. And five very clear prints made by the right-hand fingers of Mickey Finn."

"Now this spindle that was thrown by someone

here yesterday—your finger-print men examined that thoroughly, did they not?”

“They did.”

“Whose finger prints did they find?”

“Pio Mora’s and Mickey Finn’s.”

“Good prints?”

“Excellent.”

“Still you got nothing on me,” Finn bellowed. “You got just as much on Mora as you have on me.”

“So far, yes,” said Platt. “But when I tell you we also have your finger prints on those receipts—you remember Mora said he did not touch those papers. He said somebody else cleaned off that spindle. There is no print of his on any of them.”

Finn’s sharp jaw stuck out, but only for a moment. Then it dropped. He seemed to be on the point of surrender. His long hands fell limply between his knees, the cuffs striking the rung of his chair.

“I didn’t kill Larkin,” he said, “but if you let me have a word with Miss Drew—in private—I’ll tell you who did kill him!”

CHAPTER XLV

TED MOREHOUSE started, his big fists clenched tight.

"The murderous rat," he said. "Speak to you? I'll——"

"But, Ted——" Molly smiled fondly at him, but her chin showed rebellion—"but, Ted, perhaps he really has something to tell me."

"Don't go near him," her father warned her. "He's up to some trick. See how his shifty eyes are looking all around the room—looking for a way to escape."

Molly stood up, brushing away their fears with a light laugh.

"Ever since I heard of the Larkin murder," she said, "I've wanted to know who murdered him. This man says he knows. He's manacled. He's in a room full of policemen. What trick can help him?"

She started toward Finn before they could stop her. Platt stood in her way.

"Give me a moment, please," he said. He took her hand and walked with her toward the door of the den.

"Molly," he said earnestly, "I don't want you to talk to that man. I have no idea what's in his mind; but I can assure you it isn't anything good. I've told

you how he went for a walk with that poor devil who was later found at the bottom of the elevator shaft. You know how he shot a man in the back. He's desperate now, playing for time."

"But—with all these men around, and everyone of them with a gun—what can he do?" Molly asked. What serious creatures men were, she thought, and how cautious.

"But he's a hop-head, Molly. And hop-heads can't be trusted, even in jail. But that isn't the reason I took you over here. I wanted to explain about the rubies."

"You don't have to explain, Geoff," she said softly.

"But I do," he insisted. "You see—it was I who stole them from you."

"You?"

"My crook friends have been good teachers," he said, looking into her deep gray eyes. "I took them from your neck while you were attending to Carozzo. I didn't want them to be found on you, because—because they were stolen. And because—because I wanted to give them to you myself. I didn't want you to remember Carozzo when you wore them. I wanted you to remember me."

"But, Geoff—I can't take them from you. They're too valuable."

"But you took them from Carozzo. Oh—I know why you took them. But——"

"No, Geoff. I did take them from Carozzo. But I

didn't want them. I was glad when they were stolen. They made me feel—ugh!—as if I had sold myself to him for a mess of red pebbles.”

“We are friends, Molly?”

“The best of friends, Geoff.”

“You would not marry me—but wouldn't you like me to be happy?”

“Oh, Geoff, you know I would.”

“Then let me have this little pleasure of giving you these rubies. They are nothing to me. I can't wear them. I can't spend them. I shall only lock them up in a vault and leave them there.”

“But some day there will be a girl——”

He shook his head.

“Some day you may have a niece,” she reminded him.

“Molly, there hasn't been a girl born into the De Mournay family in the last two hundred years.”

“Two hundred years!” she said, shoving the little yellow lock out of her eye. “It's about time the family had some good luck.”

“Will you compromise?” he asked, laughing with her. “Let me give you one of these rubies for a ring—and I'll keep the others for my niece. Will you, Molly?”

“Yes,” she said. “But it must be the smallest ruby of the lot.”

“I'll pick it,” he said. He turned to lead her back to her father.

"I'm sorry I can't be at your wedding," he said. "I must take this man to Keen's office; and I don't know how long it will be before he makes his confession."

"You think he killed Larkin?"

"I'm sure of it."

CHAPTER XLVI

MOLLY was so absorbed in the change that had come over Platt's thin pallid face that she did not see Mickey Finn running toward her—not until it was too late.

Finn came with his handcuffed hands raised high above his head. He came running, crying, "Mr. Platt! Mr. Platt!" And before Platt was aware of his intention, Finn had brought his hands down, over Molly's head, down to her waist, encircling her, holding her prisoner. In each of his hands was an automatic—his elbow guns.

He turned her violently around so that he stood with his back to the door of the den, his face to Platt. Molly's arms were pinioned to her side, her head was on Finn's breast. She tried to free herself. She could not.

"Keep still," he said.

Molly obeyed, frightened.

"Hands in the air," Finn cried. "If anyone makes a move I'll kill the girl!"

"Do as he says!" Platt commanded.

A moment before the room had been buzzing with

conversation. Now it was so still Molly could hear men breathing.

Finn snarled out orders. His jaw was in her hair. And his breath. She tried to jerk her head away from him. His right arm tightened about her, hurting her.

"Get over on that side of the room," Finn ordered. "All of youse! Quick!"

He laughed as they complied.

"Mora," he said, "take the key out of that fat-headed cop's vest."

She heard heavy steps, the jingle of earrings.

"Unlock them cuffs."

Molly waited, heard the sound of metal falling on the floor. Finn's cuffs? No. The waiter's, perhaps.

"You, Flat Wheel."

"Yes, sir," she heard the waiter's voice.

"Take them cuffs off Mora. And then you two guys frisk all these dicks."

He laughed.

"A fine lot of chumps youse are," he called. "You thought you had Mickey Finn, eh?"

Again Molly tried to jerk away. She could not endure holding her head so. Finn gave way a step, and Molly heard quick feet coming toward her, a man running. She heard a shot. She screamed.

"Ted! Ted, are you hurt?"

"It's nothing." It was Ted's voice. He had fallen to the floor. He was lying there, bleeding—dying perhaps—and she couldn't see him, couldn't go to him.

"Quick, Mora," Finn called. "Open these cuffs on me. And you, Flat Wheel——"

"Let the doctor go to him," Molly begged. Thank God the medical examiner was still here.

"Let him croak!" Finn said. "Flat Wheel—get busy. Line them guys up, and frisk them. Pile their guns on that table, and then bring the table here. Anybody makes a move, shoot."

"I'm all right, Molly," Ted was saying. "It's only a scratch. In my leg." He laughed to soothe her. She sobbed.

She waited—an interminable time. She pictured the line of men standing on the far side of the room, under the balcony, faces to the wall, hands in the air; pictured Mora and the waiter searching them, taking guns, billies, clubs.

In a little while these three men would escape from the room. Must she go with them? Away from Ted? That could not be! Ted lying on the floor, a few feet away from her, wounded, bleeding, with no one to help him!

"Make a tourniquet, Ted," she called.

"I'm making one, dear," he said.

"Shut up!"

Again Mora's heavy tread and the jingling of his earrings. He was coming to unlock Finn's handcuffs. He was pulling the table. It screeched on the floor. No, that was the waiter—pulling the table loaded with guns.

She felt the pressure of Finn's arms slacken, heard the key clink on the steel of the gyves, felt herself free. She dropped through the arms that had held her prisoner, squirmed aside, and felt a hand in her hair, and Finn's voice crying; "Get up, you——"

As she jerked away she heard shots close to her, so close they stunned her. The smell of the powder and the heat of the discharge made her believe for a moment that Finn was shooting at her.

But he was shooting at Mora. Mora's great hands were holding Finn's thin wrists, and Finn was shooting from both guns.

She lay between their feet, looking up. Mora stepped over her carefully, pushing Finn back, holding onto his wrists, letting him shoot.

She sat up. She caught a glimpse of Finn's face, his mouth, his little red-rimmed eyes. What must he see in Mora's face to put such terror in him? She felt ill—but she could not take her eyes from the spectacle of these two men.

Finn's guns were empty, but Mora was still upright, still clutching those thin wrists. Blood streamed from him; but his earrings jingled gaily. He staggered, coughed, and Finn wrenched loose his hands, and ran.

He darted through the den, through the French window, out across the snow-covered roof toward the spot where the fire escape had been—the fire escape that had been removed.

He turned, perhaps to see if he were pursued, turned, still running. The act caused him to slip on the steel plates, to fall. He fell headlong onto the bridge. He screamed. His hands caught a girder, but it was covered with ice, and he could not hold onto it. His fingers slipped from it, and he dropped.

For a moment Molly stared at the place where his hands had been, still seeing the clutching frantic fingers slipping off the ice. She pictured his body falling, falling, turning in the air, crashing on the ground. His last scream was echoing in her ears.

She rose from the floor, leaned against the wall, and saw Mora lying at her feet. His wife, in her many coloured dresses, was dipping her finger in his blood, and making the sign of the cross.

Platt caught her as she swayed. His face was ashen.

"You're—all right?" he asked.

"All right," she said. "Ted?"

"Only a flesh wound."

Molly did not see the rabbit-faced waiter slumped on a chair, head and arms lying on the table, weeping into a pile of guns. She did not see the reporters running out—free at last to write the story of their lives. She did not see the detectives, sheepish and subdued, angry and blasphemous, looking for their weapons among the assortment under the waiter's arms.

She saw only Ted.

He was sitting on a chair, and the doctor was bandaging the calf of his right leg. Her father was standing in back of him.

Ted was looking at her, holding out his arms. And as she ran to him he stood up—to the doctor's great disgust—and held her close to him.

THE END