

## CHAPTER XVI

ALL the way from the *Chronicle* office to the hotel they walked in silence. The crowds jostled them. Policemen yelled at them. Motorists swore at them. They neither saw nor heard.

Mrs. Sommers was sitting by the window when they came into the hotel room. She had been crying.

"They've sent him to jail," Molly said. She took off her tight gray hat and tossed it on the bed.

"I know," her mother said. Her voice was flat, barren. "Mr. Edens 'phoned me. And the boys are shouting it now, down in the street."

Ted sat on the nearest chair. He looked at Mrs. Sommers, saw how the sun lighted up the bright strands in her red-gray hair, saw that her eyes were red, saw—for the first time—that she was old and tired.

Molly put her handbag on the dresser, unpinned the orchids, took her suitcase from its stand by the closet door, and began to open it.

"I was going to pack your clothes," her mother said, "but I had neither the heart nor the ambition. I just sat here and cried, and listened to the news-boys."

"But you don't have to pack until to-morrow," Ted said quickly, a great fear coming into his mind.

"I'm not going to Sommerville," Molly said, "I'm going to New York—to-night."

"New York?"

She was on her knees, busy with the straps, and could not see his face.

"You knew I would go," she said.

"Yes, but—I didn't think you'd go so soon. Molly, marry me, and we'll both go. I'll do everything I can to help you. We can get a license in Chicago early to-morrow morning, and catch the Century. Then——"

She brushed back her hair impatiently, took a gown out of the opened suitcase, and smoothed it with her hands.

"No, Ted. I must go alone."

"Alone! But what can you do alone?"

"I can sing."

"I know that, dear—but how will that help?"

"I shall get a job singing in that roof-garden cabaret. If I can't do that, I'll get a job scrubbing floors. It doesn't matter what I do so long as I get in. Once there I can tell better how to go ahead. Somebody in that place has Larkin's diamond. That's the man who killed him. I'll find out who he is."

"You're a little white lamb going into the woods to see which wolf ate her father," he said angrily. She sprang up, stood before him.

"Nevertheless, I shall find out," she said, her eyes challenging him. "And I shall get the diamond, and set my father free."

"Maybe I'm dumb, Molly. But even if you did get the diamond—what would it prove?"

"It would prove that the man who had it had a motive for killing Larkin—a stronger motive than my father had. It would start an investigation that would bring out the truth."

"And in the meantime——"

"You're afraid," she cried. "You don't trust me."

"I'm not afraid of anything you may do. I'm afraid that something will happen to you, something you won't be able to prevent."

"Oh, there will be danger," she said lightly, and the bright head went backward in a swift little jerk. "But what is danger?"

"Have you seen my mother's red eyes? Then look at them now. Have you heard Ella crying in the night because her beau has left her? Have you seen Connie and Lucia blush when their father's name was mentioned? They couldn't even stay in the lobby to-day, because they thought everybody was looking at them, pointing them out. Anthony Sommers' children!"

"Do you realize," she went on, her hands clenching and the colour flaming in her cheeks, "do you realize that a gang of crooks has shut up an innocent man for the rest of his life, branded him liar and

drunkard and thief and murderer? Do you realize we must all bear his shame who bear his name?"

"Shame? Tommyrot! People talk, of course. But they'll forget in a little while. Anyway, I don't see what you can do about it, alone and unprotected. Let me take you to New York. You can sing in the cabaret, and I'll be a steady customer. I'll take you there every night. I'll take you home every morning."

"No, that wouldn't do at all. I must be free to come with anyone I choose, to go home with anyone I choose."

"I tell you, Molly, you are going to sacrifice yourself."

"What if I do?" she asked, and he threw up his hands as though she had struck at him.

He thought, as he looked at her now, standing so straight, her cheeks so flushed, her eyes so glorious with defiance, that she had never been more beautiful. She had never seemed so near to him and so far away.

"You are too wonderful to ruin your life for anyone," he said.

She took a step nearer to him, her bosom vibrant, as though strong wings beat fast within it, and he felt her breath upon his face, warm, sweet. Her voice was low.

"Nobody in the world is too big to sacrifice everything for Anthony Sommers!"

"Mrs. Sommers, can't you say something to her?" the desperate young man asked. "Can't you make her see——?"

The woman made a gesture with her hands.

"She's her father's daughter, Ted," she said softly. "I'm sorry for you. But she's her own woman. She will do as she will—and I will not forbid her. She is Judith."

"Judith?"

"Judith of Bethulia. It's in the Bible, one of the apocryphal books, the Book of Judith. The people in Bethulia were dying of hunger and thirst and pestilence. The dead covered the streets, and the dying fell and covered them. The Assyrians were encamped outside the city, and there was no mercy in them. Judith stole out one night to the tent of Holofernes. And she made eyes at him. And she got him drunk, and cut off his head and brought it back to her people. And the next day the Assyrians, when they saw the head of Holofernes, fled in terror.

"And Judith said, 'As the Lord liveth, who hath kept me in my way that I went, my countenance hath deceived him to his destruction, and yet hath he not committed sin with me, to defile and shame me.'"

"Yes, but——"

"Ted, don't you think Judith was a pretty big woman to do what she did?"

"Of course."

“And if God watched over Judith, He will watch over Molly.”

“And even if Holofernes had shamed her,” said Molly quietly, “she would still have been a pretty big woman. And I don’t believe God would have paid so much attention to her sin.”

“But in New York——” Again Ted was interrupted.

“Morals aren’t governed by geography,” Molly said. “A girl can break her heart as easily on Main Street as on Broadway, as quickly in her own home in Sommerville as in a cabaret on the roof of a New York skyscraper.”

She held out her hand to him, but perhaps he did not see it, for wrath and bewilderment and despair blinded him. He turned on his heel suddenly, and bade her a brusque good-bye, and hurried out through the door.

For a moment she couldn’t believe he was gone. For a moment she stood, facing the door, tempted to open it and run after him, and call him back. The exaltation she had known a few moments ago when her mother talked of Judith had left her; the sense of high adventure and romance had staled; and the thrill that lay in the thought of dangers to be met was gone—gone like Ted.

She ran to her mother and wept like any other girl who has quarrelled with her sweetheart and lost him.

## CHAPTER XVII

MOLLY was coming across the choppy waters from Jersey City when she first saw New York. She moved to the prow of the ferryboat—and there it lay!

Acres and acres of buildings rising into the clouds, a million windowpanes glittering in the sun. Miles and miles of towers, and back of them miles and miles of other towers. Wealth undreamed of rose and fell with the motion of the ferry, power uncalculated, majesty incomparable, beauty beyond all hope of realization.

She felt every moment that those dancing buildings would dissolve, would gradually melt into the fancy that gave them birth, would vanish like the silent ghosts they seemed. Her heart pounded. The salt spray wet her cheeks, her lips, her hair. The shine came into her eyes, the flush to her cheeks. And a voice within her cried, "New York! New York!"

Her love for the city grew with the days. She loved it because it was mighty and naïve; loved it for its vigour and its laziness, its squalor and its beauty; its tenement houses decked with lines of washing like battleships with flags, its old brownstone houses, its great buildings; loved its streets filled with shiny

limousines and awkward busses and worn-out little street cars, its sidewalks filled with slow-moving crowds; loved it for its pushcarts, its stores, and shops and restaurants and theatres and churches, its children playing in the cobblestoned streets and its thousands and thousands of babies taking the air in their perambulators; loved it for its noise and its dirt, its torn-up bumpy thoroughfares, its gaiety, its eternal restlessness; loved it for its rivers and its bridges and its ships, its subways and elevated lines and—curiously enough—for its fire escapes. In after years she never thought of New York without seeing fire escapes staggering up every wall.

A wild impatience grew in her as the ferry neared its slip, and she wanted to shout "Hurry! Hurry!" The boat went so slowly into its berth, so aggravatingly slowly. It bumped against the piles on one side, slued around, straightened, bumped the dock. A man slowly removed the chains in front while another was slowly fastening the cables. Why couldn't they hurry? At last the way was clear. She ran, carrying her suitcase, ran into the terminal, and bought all the New York papers on the stand.

She read them quickly, one by one, looking for news of her father. But she could not find his name anywhere. The papers had forgotten Anthony Sommers as if he had never been. She was about to throw away the last of the papers when her eye caught the words "the Corsairs' Club."



She read the story quickly, read it again. It was brief but colourful. It was an omen of good luck, Molly thought, even if it was about an attempted suicide.

Monica Lane, former cigarette girl in the Corsairs' Club [the paragraph said], tried to kill herself last night. She had been drinking with friends in an uptown speak-easy. Suddenly she reached into her handbag, pulled out a bottle, raised it as though to give a toast, and cried, 'I'll see you all in hell.' She put the bottle to her lips, but one of her friends knocked it to the floor, burning his hand with acid. Monica was arrested, charged with disorderly conduct. She was released on bail and went to her home at — West Fifty-seventh Street.

"How simple!" Molly thought. She had only to find this girl and make her her friend. Monica could tell her about the Corsairs' Club—might be able to help her—might even know something about the murder.

Molly ran out of the Erie terminal, hailed the first taxicab she saw, and gave the chauffeur Monica's address. The ancient vehicle threaded through the traffic, skidding, bumping, rushing, missing other cars miraculously, and stopped outside a red brick building at the corner of Ninth Avenue and Fiftv-seventh street.

There was a sign in one of the front windows: "Room to Let." Here was more luck. It was a rooming house. She could live under the same roof with

Monica Lane. There was no doubt now that they two would be friends.

The room was small and up four flights. Old smells clung to it like barnacles to a rock, and old sighs seemed to hover in it. There was a gray crockery pitcher and basin on the abashed dresser—something Molly had not seen in the country in many years. The bed was narrow, and sagged in the middle. It had gray blankets, and gray sheets and pillow cases that were supposed to be white. There was a rocking chair with one good arm, and, in a corner, a closet made of boards painted green. Inside it were hooks, and a pole with coat hangers. The one window looked down on the elevated road.

Molly took the room, and was glad.

"I understand my friend Monica Lane lives here," she said to the withered lady who showed the room. "Does she live on this floor?"

"Bless you," said the other, "I don't know. There's a Bessie Lane and a Mary Lane and a Lily Lane. If there's a Monica Lane I don't know her. What does she look like, now?"

Molly didn't know, but she couldn't say so.

"Oh, I'll find her if she's here," she said.

But weeks went by and Molly didn't see Monica; or if she did, she didn't know her. It was hard to make friends with the girls in this house, she learned. They stared at her, but made no overtures. Even the little brunette in the next room had no greeting for

her when they met in the corridor. Like all the others she seemed suspicious of Molly.

At first Molly hadn't minded, for she had counted on seeing her father, and getting a description of Monica from him. But she had not been able to see her father.

She went to the penitentiary the day after she arrived in New York. She went almost singing, and returned near to tears.

She had taken him some books, and a box of cigars, the kind he liked. And as she passed through the entrance arch in the gloomy wall, above which a man walked carrying a rifle, she had thought: "He may finish these books in his cell, but he'll smoke the last of the cigars at home."

He would be surprised to see her. How long was it since she had seen him last? Three years. More than three years. He would be surprised—and perhaps unpleasantly. Oh, he would be glad to see her, of course; but would he want her to see him in his convict's uniform? He must feel the disgrace of that uniform keenly. But she would tell him she was more proud of him now than she had ever been—for he had preferred disgrace to lying.

She would not tell him of her plans, but she would ask him about Carozzo, and Mora, and Marcia, and all those others, and about the cigarette girl. Artful, innocent questions they would be. It would

be difficult to fool him, she knew. But she had confidence in her ability.

She smiled sweetly as she entered the warden's office.

"I am Molly Sommers," she said. "I want to see my father, Anthony Sommers!"

If she had said, "I want to see the President," her voice and her mien would have been no different.

A young man looked at her suspiciously, though with some deference, and his voice was gentle as he told her, "But that's impossible."

"Impossible? Why, impossible?"

"Why, Anthony Sommers is in the prison hospital," the young man said. "Nothing serious. Just a nervous breakdown. But nobody is allowed to see him."

"If I could talk to the warden——"

"Sorry! Those are the warden's orders." He turned away from her; and to Molly it seemed that he was uneasy.

"Could I leave him a letter?" she asked.

The young man agreed to that—a little too quickly, she thought.

She could feel him staring at her as she wrote.

"You'll see that he gets this?"

"Certainly," he answered. But there was something in his manner that made her distrust him, something she could feel but could not name. She

left the letter with him, and the books, and the cigars.

And in all these weeks there had been no word from her father, no acknowledgment of the letters she wrote. Every day she called the penitentiary from a public telephone. Every day she was given the same information.

"He's in the hospital. You can't see him."

There was something sinister in all this, she knew. A girl would be allowed to see her father, even if he were in the condemned cell waiting to be put in the chair. Why couldn't she see Anthony Sommers?

"He must be seriously ill," she thought, "or he would answer my letters. He will die unless I save him soon. And how shall I save him? If only I could find Monica Lane."

She began asking the girls in the rooming house, "Pardon me, aren't you Monica Lane?" She wrote a letter to Monica saying, "I must see you"—but nothing came of it. Was it possible the newspaper had printed the wrong address in that little paragraph about the cigarette girl?

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE days dragged by, and nothing happened. She wrote long letters to her mother and her sisters, cheery letters, optimistic letters full of tender white lies. Now and then she sent them little presents she found in the shops.

But the days weren't all solid gray. One couldn't be unhappy all the time in New York.

The nights were doors that locked her in with loneliness and homesickness and worry and doubt and despair. But the days were filled with windows.

There were so many things one could do by day. One could go down Broadway to Times Square and look up at the roof of the Allegheny Building. One could stand and look at the girls. Molly liked New York girls. She liked their short skirts, the way they pulled their helmets over their shingled heads, their dainty shoes. They were like a lot of cut-out paper dolls, she thought, with the right cut-out clothes. They were slim silhouettes denying the existence of bodies, lovely shapes with flashing eyes and scarlet lips.

One could walk down Fifth Avenue. Ah, Fifth

Avenue! There was a secret little thrill in every foot of it that was like an anodyne. Fifth Avenue became Molly's happy hunting ground.

The innocent-seeming shops in Fifty-seventh Street she avoided after her first experience. She had strolled east in the impressive stately thoroughfare, and in the window of Eileen Drew's she had seen a black taffeta bare of adornment save for a girde of tiny crystals. It was good. It was sophisticated. It was beautiful. The ash-blond saleslady told her it was called "the Black Narcissus." The crystals turned out to be perfect diamond-shaped mirrors but the price was not the \$40 or \$45 Molly thought it might be. It was \$450.

Molly got her black taffeta on Fifth Avenue; but she never forgot Eileen Drew's. She stood on the sidewalk a few minutes after she left the shop staring at the name on the window.

"I can't buy her dresses," she thought, "but I can use her name. Eileen Drew. I must remember now that I am Molly Sommers no longer—not in New York. I am Eileen Drew." She laughed, wondering what the real owner of the name was like.

One could do 'most anything in the long days; but at night one could only sit by the window and plan, and despair, and go to bed to dream—to dream of her father in the penitentiary hospital, or her mother, or her school door bubbling with children at recess time, or of Ted. Ted! It had been sweet to

dream of him—as she lay in her white room at home, or in the windy attic in the farmhouse near her school where she had boarded five nights a week.

Now when she awakened it was to realize that love was over and Ted was gone, and she was alone in New York, bewildered, helpless—in despair. She was a romantic, stubborn fool, she told herself. She would fail, as Ted had predicted. She had cut herself off from everyone, to save her father—and she didn't know how to begin! The task was too big for her, too big for any girl. And love tormented her, mocked her.

One hot August night she sat by the window. Her mind was still unbrushed of the cobwebs of her thoughts—and it seemed for a moment that she was in the attic of the farmhouse, under the fragrant strings of herbs that hung from the eaves. A clock would strike, she fancied, and downstairs tired farming people would sleep on, and in the barnyard a cock would crow.

She looked at the moon, a sulphurous moon bearded with a gray wisp of cloud. But in the moon-wash were only strange, hostile buildings, and a dark street, and tall lamps and an elevated train roaring and shrieking and rushing into the dark.

She looked at the moon again, wondered if Ted were looking at it, too. She pictured him walking in the moonlight with a girl, smiling at her, holding her hand.



She sang almost without realizing it, sang because there was need of song;

*"You are gone, and all is gone;  
And through each weary day,  
Only tender memories remain."*

Weeks ago, when she had first sung this melody, she had laughed at its surplus of sentiment, its self-pity, its cloying sweetness. But now it seemed to express everything she felt within her.

*"Memories are sunbeams  
Through a sky of cloudy gray,  
Memories are roses in the rain."*

She remembered cool, dim paths in the woods, a lane that wandered by the crooked Kickapoo, a field where she and Ted had hunted four-leaf clovers years ago.

*"Days I knew, with you,  
Are just a memory. Just a memory.  
That is all—that's left to me.  
Happiness, I guess—is just a memory.  
Just a memory—  
Of a love that used to be."*

Ah, that night when the sky was powdered with stars, and Ted had held her in his arms and kissed her, perhaps for the last time!

THE BROADWAY MURDERS    III

*“Will we share the night, the moon, the stars above, again?  
Will I live to hope, to sing, to smile, to laugh again?  
Love again?  
In my dreams, it seems,  
Your face is near to me,  
And it's dear to me,  
Though it's just—a memory!”*

Someone was rapping on her door. Had she disturbed the house? Was it the landlady come to complain—or the hard little brunette next door? She put on a kimono. Suddenly her hands began to shake. Could it be—could it be Ted? She felt a weakness in her knees. She went to the door and opened it.