

CHAPTER XXV

TED MOREHOUSE came into New York with the first snow of December; and the adventures of Molly Sommers began to march quickly to a melodramatic climax.

He came because he could no longer endure to live so far away from her. He came determined to take her home and marry her whether she would or not—but the nearer he came to the city the less strong that determination grew. What if, despite everything he could say or do, Molly insisted on staying in New York?

He looked like a convalescent when he stepped off the train, but he would let no redcap carry his heavy grips. He felt he must have something in his hands, must hold onto something. The redcaps eyed him with some respect for all that he “did his own totin’.”

“That cloud of gloom’s goin’ somewheres to light’n and thundeh and hail and snow and sleet,” one of them remarked. “Yesseh, he’s a heavy-laden cloud, pregmunt with devastation and ruin and woe for some poo’ suckeh!”

Ted looked much older than he was. There were lines of suffering on his face. He was lean. He was tamed, even to his wild black hair and his mettlesome hands. But his mouth was grim.

It was dark when he arrived at his hotel. He put on his dinner clothes, fumbling a long time with the studs and the black bow tie. He sat down at the 'phone and stared a long time at the slip of paper containing Molly's address and telephone number. Mrs. Sommers had written them for him. He put the paper in his pocket. He decided not to telephone. He was afraid to trust his voice. He would go to her without warning. To-morrow they'd start home.

Up the first flight of stairs that led to Molly's apartment he went like a man going into battle. But up the second flight he walked almost reluctantly. His hand beat fast on the door; but his heart beat faster. In a moment she would be in his arms, laughing and crying, kissing him. He did not doubt that. But when he had informed her that she must come home with him—and no nonsense about it—what would she do? What would she say?

"Don't get excited, baby," he heard a voice addressing him through the door. The door was yanked open suddenly, and a girl looked at him. Not Molly.

"Is the dump raided?" she asked.

He looked at her, puzzled, unable to find an answer.

"Geez, don't take it so hard, Big Boy!" the girl

said, beginning to smile. "Come on in and give them hoofs a rest. You want Dearie, don't you? Well, come in and park. She ain't out in the hall."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I had forgotten Molly roomed with you. You're Miss Wolfe?"

"Yes."

"I'm Ted Morehouse."

"Meet the boy friend, Mr. Blum," she said, and Ted shook hands with a little man who had an iron grip—a man of medium height, distinguished only by a thin strip of sandy stubble over his upper lip and a forehead that was shaped like half a cantaloupe.

"Dearie's out," said Babe, helping Ted off with his coat. "We've just finished the turkey, me and the boy friend. But maybe I could find you a drumstick." She threw the coat over the back of a chair.

"No, thanks. I'm—not hungry."

The girl led him to a couch in the living room.

"I guess that'll hold you," she said, looking from the sagging green atrocity to the huge young man. She began to clear away the dishes, now picking at what meat was left on the bones, now licking her finger of its cranberry sauce.

Ted looked at the kitchenette, the dining room—how worn the rug was!—and what he could see of the bedroom through its partly opened door. Molly ought to be glad to leave this place, he thought.

"How come I never see you before?" Babe asked. "You never been at the club. And why do you call

her Molly? That her real name? You must of knew her then, eh?"

Ted answered as best he could. Had Molly never spoken of him? He must be careful to call Molly by her new name. Where could she be? He looked at his watch several times. Six-forty-five—seven-thirty—eight-twenty-eight. Would she never come? Maybe these people wanted to go out, and were too polite to say so.

Mr. Blum talked of the weather and of the building he was "running up." Ted learned he was a structural steel constructor, and that his building was the tallest in New York.

"Right next to the Allegheny, and one floor above it now. And when she gets her tower on—boy!"

"The Allegheny? Isn't that where—where Eileen sings?"

"Of course. And the people that own that building are raising this one right next to it, and linking the two with bridges. We're shoving a bridge across now to the Allegheny roof."

The conversation dragged like the time though Babe did her best to be bright and interesting.

"A watched door never opens, Big Boy!" she said several times. And several times she said, "I knew you didn't get them shoulders playing highball in a night club." She talked of Molly, too.

"The reporters are all crazy about her. Nat Reticker's column is full of stories about her—some of

them true. Irving Henschell writes poetry to her. Her picture is in some paper every Sunday. Even Kelly, the cop on the beat, could love her in a big way!"

Babe was starting to explain why it took "lots of personality" to be a cabaret singer—how some big stage stars had flopped because they were used to singing from a stage and couldn't get over it—when light, fast feet sounded on the stairway.

Ted shot up from the couch. He trembled all over his great body. His face flushed, whitened, flushed again. He started toward the door, stopped, waited.

Molly threw open the door singing, "Hello, everybody," not seeing Ted until he leaped toward her.

How dear she was, her cheeks and her eyelashes wet with snow, her gray eyes ashine with happiness, her cheeks aflame with health, snow on her collar, snow on her coat!

"Molly!" he cried.

And she was in his arms, as he had dreamed, but it was he who was laughing and crying. He kissed her lips. They were cold and wet, and warm and sweet, and salty with tears. He kissed her cheeks, her cold wet cheeks. She was actually in his arms! He was really kissing her!

Why—why—what was this? She had torn herself away from him. She had stepped back from him. She stood erect, angry, and she was saying, "What right had you? What right?"

And there was a man standing in back of her, a fat greasy man with black eyes that glittered, and a ragged moustache, a man with fat diamonds on his fingers and in his shirt, a man who wanted to know——

“Who is this man, Dearie?”

“Oh, he’s only a boy I used to know,” Molly was saying. “He kissed me!”

The fat greasy man pushed past her, stood in front of Ted.

“So? You kissed her!”

Ted could not help seizing both the man’s arms, and lifting him off the floor, and holding him in front of his eyes and saying, “yes, I kissed her.”

“Put him down, Big Boy,” an excited voice said from somewhere behind him. “And handle with care. That’s Carozzo.”

“Put him down,” said Molly.

Ted looked from Molly to Carozzo, from frightened gray eyes to murderous black ones.

“Listen, you,” he said now to Carozzo—wondering when his victim would begin to talk, hoping he would furnish justification for further violence, surprised that he didn’t squirm or try to free himself, “listen, you—that girl is mine, and I’ll kiss her when I wish. I’ve come to take her home with me. And if you don’t like it——”

Why didn’t the man say something?

Molly laughed, coldly, scornfully. Ted dropped

Carozzo and stared at her, his anger burning out, his desperation growing.

"I'm sorry, Joe," Molly said. She walked to Carozzo, felt his arms. "Did he hurt you?"

Carozzo laughed.

"I am hurt only in my dignity," he said. "But—I don't blame this fellow too much. He is in love." He turned suavely on Ted, looked him up and down, smiled at him—how that smile hurt!—made him a little bow.

"I am sorry," he said, "but I must tell you, Miss Drew is my fiancée."

He offered his hand.

Ted was aware of a little sound in Molly's throat, of Babe's voice saying, "I'll be damned!" He ignored Carozzo's hand, turned his back, walked slowly to the couch, sat down heavily, and looked at the well-worn rug.

"It's too bad," Carozzo was saying to Babe. "We came to take you out for a ride."

"Thanks," Babe said quickly, "but we got a date with one of Mr. Blum's boy friends and his sweetie. We're waiting for them now."

"Some other night." A door slammed. A bolt was shot. A woman's hand fell on Ted's shoulder. Babe's voice came from afar off, saying, "Don't take it so hard, kid. Honest you're like to make me bust out crying."

"His fiancée!" he heard himself saying.

"Applesauce," Babe said. "I could see Dearie was in love with you the minute she saw you was here. Honest she like to melted in your arms. I seen her kissing you like nobody's business. But when Big Joe come up so quick—why, she had to think fast. See? Big Joe's her big bread-and-butter man. He's fell for her strong enough to give her diamonds. Did you see the pendant she was wearing when she come in? He give her that. And he didn't get anything for it, neither. Lots of men are that way about Dearie, kid. She panics 'em. Even Geoff Platt hates the thought of saying good-night to Dearie. But you——" She laughed gently. "Hell, Big Boy, you're aces up with her, but of course she can't let on."

"That's right," Mr. Blum said. "Carozzo's only the rent to Dearie!" He put a glass in Ted's hand. "That's just off the boat."

"Yeh, it's the varnish," Babe commented.

Ted felt fiery liquor in his mouth and throat. He stood up. Mechanically Mr. Blum refilled his glass. Mechanically Ted emptied it.

"Let's go out and ruin a sandwich," Babe said. "You ain't eaten anything in a long time, I know. And me—I ate, but I ain't on no diet."

She bundled him into his coat as though he were as helpless as he looked, chattering all the time.

"Dearie's some little actress, all right. But she don't fool me. I seen the way she looked at you. And say—I sure like the way you pick up a guy on first

acquaintance. Wait 'til I give the girls a load of that! You ought to go into the two-a-day. No kidding. Don't get her wrong. Like I said, Carozzo's only her bread and butter—but you're her sugar!"

They escorted him down the stairs. They sat on either side of him in the cab. They took him between them into a restaurant. They were sympathetic, they were encouraging, they were even a little proud of being seen with him. He wondered why, not knowing that there is nothing so dear to Broadway as an unhappy lover. He is a challenge to everyone. He is a gift from the gods—a story to tell all over the street, and retell, and embellish—he's a pet who asks only for kindness. And he cares little how much he spends.

All during dinner Babe and Mr. Blum bantered Ted, and tried to cheer him, laughed at him, listened to his extravagant talk of love. What things they would have to tell to-morrow!

"'F I were you," Mr. Blum said as they left the restaurant, "I'd take her home to-morrow willy-nilly. Yes, sir. Willy-nilly. And no nonsense." His chest swelled. He looked angry, important, wise. "Broadway's no place for a girl like Eileen Drew. Babe, now—that's different. Babe's been through the mill. Yes, sir."

They walked up Broadway and told him of their own romance.

"I was tripping along minding my own business," Babe explained, "when this"—she prodded a fond

finger into Mr. Blum's stomach—"tipped its hat and says, 'Hello, Gloria Swanson!'"

"And she comes right back at me," Blum said, "and she says, 'Well, if it ain't Fatty Arbuckle!' And she walks on like I'm dust. I was standing right here, right in this exact spot, in front of my building, and I watch her trip across the street, and into the Allegheny. And says I, 'She's one of them show girls on the roof,' and I makes up my mind to marry her willy-nilly. Yes, sir. Willy-nilly. And I done it. Yes, sir. Come Christmas me and Babe get riveted together."

They turned into the lobby of the Allegheny Building.

"Come up with us," Mr. Blum invited.

"Up?"

"Up to the roof," said Babe.

"Up to the roof? Where she—where she is?"

He looked at them as though he had just met them. "I couldn't," he said. "I—never want to see her again!"

CHAPTER XXVI

TED remembers little of what happened after he left the lobby of the Allegheny Building. He remembers drinking with several men in a barroom. He remembers walking the streets. He remembers that whenever he looked up he saw the Allegheny looking down at him. He knows he tried to avoid the building and that it seemed to follow him.

He remembers going up to a window in some depot. He never can tell which one. He remembers getting on a train, and jumping off as it started, remembers someone calling after him, "I hope you break your neck next time, you damn fool."

He remembers going back to the Allegheny Building, and getting into the elevator, recalls that somebody tried to prevent his going to the club until someone else said, "He's all right, Jake. He came in with Babe and Blum."

He remembers how he cringed in the elevator cage when he realized he was going to the roof. He remembers the feeling he had—that he was a mouse trapped in a cage that someone was pulling up to the sky on rubber bands that might snap any moment.

He remembers how he had to fight to keep from shouting, "Stop! Let me out!" He remembers the nausea that gripped him when the cage stopped, shaking a little, bouncing a little—bouncing over a hole sixty stories deep. He remembers that his knees were shaking as he stood on the roof, and that he wanted to shut his eyes and crawl into the cabaret on his hands and knees.

But he seemed sober when he sat down beside Mr. Blum.

"Well, well!" Mr. Blum greeted him. "Glad you came. Feeling better?"

He poured a drink for Ted, and looked at him more closely.

"By the way," he said. "Where you stopping?" "McAlpin," Ted answered.

"I'll remember," Mr. Blum assured him. He was thinking he might have to take Ted home. "You're just in time," he went on, "to see the circus stuff. Wait 'til you lamp Babe. You won't know her. She's a tattooed lady. She wears tights; all tattooed, you know. And she's got to get her arms and shoulders painted every night. They got a stencil. I don't mind stencilling her arms, you know; but I said if she didn't wear tights she couldn't be in the show. Am I right?"

The circus number was Molly's idea. It originated in a talk with Geoffrey Platt. He had told her of Anson Keen's delusion that Carozzo was a fox,

Mora a tiger, Marcia a queen cobra, Theresa a goose, Flat Wheel a rabbit, and Mickey Finn a weasel.

"Mora a tiger? No, Geoff, he's a clown. Wouldn't he look funny in a clown's makeup—with those earrings and red moustaches? We must do it. Babe can be a tattooed lady; Marcia, the ringmaster; the girls can represent gymnasts, tight-rope walkers, equestriennes, and animals."

"Irving Henschell and Nat Retticker can write the songs." Platt began to catch the contagion. "Hey, Rube! It'll be a hit."

Carozzo insisted that Molly should have a part in the circus, too, but she was not to wear a circus costume. She would sing a song that must be sentimental, touching—something about a circus in it. And after she had finished, the clown could sing to her.

"*Ridi, Pagliaccio,*" he said. "Something like that, see? You're on the balcony, Eileen, and Mora sings this pathetic song to you—and you laugh at him, see? And his heart is smashed. Retticker or Henschell—they can fix up the business, eh?"

Ted looked around slowly, carefully, saw no one he knew. What was Mr. Blum saying? Good fellow, Mr. Blum. Friendly. What was he saying? Why was the man with the megaphone shouting, "Right this way to the big show, folks." Where was Molly? He must see Molly. He must take her home. Sixty

stories up! Sixty stories! He must not think of that.

A man sprinkled a few handfuls of sawdust on the dance floor. He was dressed like a fellow in a circus, Ted thought. Everybody was laughing at him, clapping, shouting, "Hey, Rube!"

A spotlight shone on the balcony. A girl stood in the light. Molly! Ted started as though in pain when he saw her. Mr. Blum's hand fell on his shoulder. He shook it off.

Molly! An old-fashioned tight bodice with ruffles of soft lace bound her immature breasts. It was gold. It glinted in the spotlight. Her shoulders and arms were white—startlingly white against that metallic sheen. A necklace of red stones caressed her neck. Her yellow hair was parted in the centre, caught into a knot in back. The skirt belled out from her hips and fell in golden folds to the floor. She sang, smiling at the crowd:

*"My heart is a circus where love jumps through hoops,
Like the riders who circle the rings;
And hope is a clown who turns handsprings and loops
And weeps in despair as he sings."*

She was smiling, but Ted was not deceived. That wasn't Molly's smile, he knew; it was only one she had learned. There was something in that smile that hurt him, set his hands to clenching. What had they done to her?

He heard nothing that she sang until she was almost done, with her arms stretched out and a look of sadness on her face:

*"But the big top is gone, like the love that I knew—
And only the sawdust remains."*

Still looking at her he pushed his empty glass toward Mr. Blum. Mr. Blum poured from his flask, advised ginger ale and ice. Ted swallowed the drink at a gulp.

The din abated somewhat. The orchestra played soft music, and a clown bounded over the floor and stood beneath the balcony. He was bigger than Ted, wider across the shoulders. Great hoops of gold hung from his ears, and jingled. A red smile was painted on his white face, and insulting red whiskers bristled over the smile. Ted could not help smiling at the fellow—though he had thought he never could smile again. All over the room little laughs floated upward like bright toy balloons.

The clown carried a concertina in his big hairy hands, and he played hilarious music on it as he bowed right and left. He looked up at Molly; and was silent so long that the orchestra hesitated, stopped. The talk and the laughter stopped. People looked at each other, amused, wondering.

The clown raised his voice in an Italian love song, and moved his hands to make heartbreaking music. Ted saw the look of surprise and dislike that Molly

could not hide. He asked Mr. Blum: "Is he supposed to do that?"

"It ain't exactly in the act," said Mr. Blum. "He's got a funny song—in English—something about a bull frog wanting a star."

Ted could hear women whispering shrilly to each other: "He's serenading her." "He's actually making love to her, my dear!" "He's singing that his heart is a little dove pining for one kind look out of her eyes."

"Who is he?" Ted asked.

"Pio Mora."

Slowly Ted reared up from his chair. Slowly he walked toward Mora; and those sober enough to read his face grew alarmed. One of them tried to stop him.

Ted wanted to rush at the clown, but his legs would not obey him. They went reluctantly, as though they were frozen and heavily weighted. He felt that he was walking in his sleep, and that it would take him hours to reach that painted red smile and ruin it. But he went forward steadily. And when he came near enough he reached out calmly, took the concertina from the clown, tore it as though it were made of paper, and threw it on the floor.

He heard Molly's voice calling his name; but it might have been the sound of rain for all the attention he paid to it. He laughed. It was so funny to see the look in those sea-green eyes, and contrast it with the painted smile.

Mora shouted, a tremendous shout that seemed to make the glasses jump on the tables, and rushed at Ted, and struck. Again Ted laughed. He stepped aside, calmly, slowly, and swung with his right hand. Ah, the smile was ruined now. There was nothing but a red blotch under the murderous eyes. The white silk of the clown's costume was reddening, too.

A hairy fist caught Ted on the jaw, stunned him for a moment, made him reel. He rushed at the clown. The clown rushed at him, threw his arms around him, and began to crush him. Ted felt he was not breathing. He threw his arms about the red-and-white figure, and hugged once with all the power he could summon. The breath went oozing out of the clown with a peculiar noise. The clown's arms relaxed. Ted put his open hand on the painted face and shoved, and the clown staggered a dozen feet in his funny shoes, and fell. He crawled to a table, overturned it, sending liquor and food and silverware and china to the floor. He broke off a leg of the table as though it were a dry twig on a rotting tree, and rushed on Ted with the weapon poised to strike.

Women were screaming, men shouting. Women were fainting, men running into the den with hysterical women, hiding under the tables. Girls in fleshings and spangles cried, "Stop him! Stop him!" A girl with bare legs, a crimson vest, a black short coat, and a top hat, looked at Ted woodenly. She had a whip in her hands.

Ted laughed again. This wasn't real. This was a nightmare. He laughed and struck again, and the clown fell once more, his gold hollow earrings jingling cheerily for a moment. Ted stood over him, panting, beginning to realize what he had done. He looked up to see Carozzo running stealthily at him, holding a bottle with a broken jagged neck.

The sight made him happy. He rushed to meet Carozzo. Carozzo jabbed at him with the bottle, cut his hands. He laughed. This was joy, to have Carozzo once more in his grip. He raised him up as he had once before, and shook him, grinning at him, shook him limp. And he kept saying, "Your fiancée, is she? Your fiancée, you say?"

Someone fired a shot. Someone hurled a bottle.

Ted threw up the limp Carozzo as though he were a rubber ball, caught him by the right thigh and the back of the neck, and tossed him to the crowd, watched him fall with his back across a table.

A bottle struck Ted on the shoulder, hurt him. A teacup gashed his neck. A table came flying toward him. He dodged, heard it crash through the window at his back.

He stood for a moment, paying no attention to the bottles and chairs and other missiles thrown at him. He was watching Carozzo and the woman with the top hat who bent over him. A bottle hit him, butt end against his forehead, and he fell. He caught up a table and used it as a shield, sitting behind it, mov-

ing it this way and that way. Chairs splintered against it. Bottles broke on it. Plates and saucers and ash trays hit it or missed it. He laughed.

The storm of missiles stopped. Ted looked up. A man stood near him, a man with a wide mouth and hard cold eyes. He held a revolver in each hand.

"If you must pick on one man," he said, "pick on me."

But nobody picked on Chet Qug.

"Get up, kid," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "You put up a swell scrap, and I let you have your fun until these gins started slinging steel. Look at the table top."

Ted looked. He saw a stiletto quivering in the wood—and the conical lead base of a spindle.

He rose, grinning, until he saw Molly. She was bending over the fat greasy face, wiping it with a damp cloth. He tried to call her name, but could not. She did not look at him.

That's all Ted remembers of the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHET QUG threw his revolvers on the floor and smashed them, to prove they were only glass. He could afford to, for, concealed in his left armpit, was the little brother of a machine gun; and it was not made of glass.

The orchestra played "I Love My Man," waiters began sweeping up the wreckage, a few couples began to dance. Qug, summoned by Molly, helped to carry Carozzo into the bedroom that opened off the den, and to place him on the bed.

It was a strange picture on which Molly looked—a bizarre crowd in a barbarous bedroom. It was a room decorated in lavender and gold, the wide, satin-covered bed standing like a throne in the centre, three steps leading up to it on each side, a purple canopy over it, a fat man lying on it as though drunk. Everywhere she looked Molly saw caricature dolls. They sat all around the bed, perched on its foot, peered out of corners. There were limp dolls among the queer-shaped bottles in the perfume racks, on the dresser, on the chairs. On the dresser she noticed a gold crucifix, candles, a deck of playing cards, a corkscrew, a bottle of whisky. In the doorway and

around the bed, and in the doorway leading into the lavender-and-green-tiled bathroom, stood as curious a lot of men and women as she had ever seen. The mirrors in the ceiling, crawling with grotesque reflections of them, gave the picture its last crazy touch.

There was Pio Mora with his red bristles streaming out of a red-and-white face, one eye black and swollen shut, the other eye swelling. He looked like a man whose face had been pushed forcibly into a bowl of strawberries and cream, Molly thought. There was Marcia, with her black silk hat askew, holding a bottle of something to Carozzo's nostrils; Mr. Blum with his arm around a frightened tattooed lady; bare-legged girls who looked like a troupe of circus people caught in a rain; men in evening clothes who chattered as noisily as the girls, and acted as nervously.

"Has anybody called the sawbones?" Qug asked Molly.

"Yes. He's coming."

"Carozzo's all right," he said. "He'll come to in a minute or so. Say, wasn't it pretty? That young drunk sure threw a mean Carozzo! Did you see Big Joe flying?"

He grinned, extending his arms and moving them like wings.

"Coo-coo, coo-coo, coo-coo!" he said. "Give him a shot of his own hooch and he'll sit up and say 'Mama!'"

"He might have been killed!" said Molly. "Only for you."

He looked at her white face with deep concern.

"So that's him, eh?" he asked. "I'm wise. He's a good kid, Miss Drew. And what a wallop! I thought he was going to tear poor Pio's face off."

He looked at Mora.

"Geez!" he said. "I didn't see that black eye before. And he can hardly peep out of the other one. Hey, Pio, I thought you was a tough guy."

Pio looked at him malevolently, looked from him to Molly, crossed to her, shoving girls right and left, excited, the scar jumping behind its blurred paint.

"Those ruby!" he cried. "Where ees those ruby, *madonna mia*?"

Molly put her hand to her neck.

"They're gone!" she said. "My rubies are gone!"

"Rubies?" asked Qug. "What rubies?"

"Carozzo gave me a necklace of rubies this evening. I know I had them on when I was singing."

The newspaper men detached themselves from the group around Carozzo's bed and hurried to her, asking questions, some of them jotting notes on little wads of paper, one of them writing on the back of an envelope.

Mickey Finn looked at her—furtively, she thought—took a package of gum from his pocket, tore off the outer wrapper; and left the room.

Molly saw Platt. He had the spindle that had been

thrown at Ted. He was weighing it, balancing it, studying it attentively. She drew him aside.

"Mora saw my rubies before I showed them to you," she said. "He told me they were too valuable for me to wear, and offered to make duplicates of them. Do you think he could have made that fake diamond they found in the wastebasket?"

Platt nodded his head gravely.

"When did Carozzo give you the rubies?" he asked.

"Just before the show. I think he gave them to me because—because he was jealous of Ted. I met Ted to-night—in my apartment. Carozzo was with me. And—and—I had to assure him that Ted was nothing to me."

She did not tell Platt what else Carozzo had said—perhaps because he seemed so absorbed in his contemplation of the spindle, perhaps because it was too personal a thing to reveal.

"These," Carozzo had said, putting the rubies into her hand, "these are nothing, Eileen. There is a diamond I will give you—when you are mine—a diamond worth a thousand times as much as these."

"The Larkin diamond!" Molly had guessed. She could still feel the thrill of the moment, still see his sly crafty smile, the hands that wanted to paw her.

"Yes," he had said. "The Larkin diamond! I was going to buy it from Larkin—the night Larkin was killed. Someone else took it. I think I know who he

is. I think I know where that diamond is. And—when you come to me—I'll buy it for you."

She had put the necklace around her neck and run to her dressing room without saying any word of gratitude. She had looked at herself in the glass, and had found a stranger's face staring back at her, a scornful face.

"You've sold your lover for a string of red pebbles," it had seemed to say to her. "But get the diamond! Carozzo has it. Carozzo stole it, and hid it—and he has it waiting for you. Get it. Hurry and get it—and free your father, whatever the consequences may be."

No, she could not tell all this to Geoffrey Platt, though some day when she could explain she would ask his pardon for thinking he had given the Larkin diamond to his sister.

"You didn't see who threw this?" Platt asked.

"No."

"He's coming to," Qug said. "Give him a shot of hooch."

Molly took the bottle from the dresser, knelt on the top step, and poured the liquor into Carozzo's partly opened mouth. He coughed, gagged, shook his head, opened his bloodshot eyes. He recognized Molly, reached for her hand, and held it.

"Joe!" It was Marcia's voice, sharp, peremptory.

Big Joe looked at her, closed his eyes again. He made no answer. Marcia turned on Molly.

"Get away from him," she said, murder in her

cobra eyes. She raised her whip. Her tongue darted in and out. "Get away from him, you cheap blonde gold digger, or I'll kill you."

Carozzo tried to sit up. He groaned. He swore. "Stop it, you fool," he said. "Get out of here. Pio, for God's sake——"

Marcia shoved Molly aside and looked down on Carozzo, her face twitching.

"Are you giving me the air?" she demanded.

"And plenty of it," Carozzo said. "Pio, why do you let her stay here?"

Mora leaped across the wide bed, the heels of his clown shoes tearing the satin spread as he came down. He caught Marcia in his arms, snatched the whip from her and threw it on the floor. Her silk hat fell off. Her long black hair fell about her; dropped, like some magic trick, from the hat. She was quiet for a moment, then began to curse Carozzo and Molly in English and Italian. She fell on her knees, bringing Mora down with her, and wept, and tried to kiss Big Joe.

"She doesn't give a damn about you, Joe," she said. "All she wants is your money, your diamonds, your rubies. She's making a fool of you. Did I ever ask you for anything, Joe? Look at me, Joe. You know I love you. You know I don't want anything but you. Joe! Joe!"

Mora raised himself, picked up the girl, and started through the crowd. Marcia screamed, tore his clothes,

scratched his face, kicked, tried to bite him. "I'll kill you," she cried. "I'll kill you and her, too."

Platt intervened.

"Put her down, Mora," he said. Mora hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Marcia's right," Platt went on. "She did love Carozzo—and you are not going to be rough with her while I'm here. May I take you home, Miss Caponi?"

Marcia looked at him gratefully. Platt put his arm about her and led her to the door. He turned, to see Molly kneeling over Big Joe, suffering him to paw her. He turned to Qug. "If she wants to be alone with him," he said, "let her." He walked out.

"Geez!" said Qug. "And I thought she was the only square dame in the street." He followed Platt.

"I was gonna say!"

Molly heard them go out: the tattooed lady, the fat lady, the human skeleton, the bareback riders, the trapeze girls, men and women who had loved and respected her. They were gone.

And Judith was left alone in the tent, and Holofernes lying along upon his bed.

She was alone. They had all deserted her: Ted, her lover; Qug; Babe; Platt, her friend. Even Platt! She was alone, and she must fight alone to free her father. She must get the Larkin diamond in the only way left to her.

There was nothing to do now except to make the

last sacrifice. Happiness was gone, friendship was gone, love was gone—even her good name. But once she had that diamond——

A vagrant thought shook her.

Suppose, when she had given herself to this man she loathed—suppose she found he knew nothing of the Larkin murder, and her sacrifice was in vain! A ghastly joke!

She went to the window and looked through the bars. It was snowing. Bars. Bars on her father's cell. Bars on her own cell. She prayed:

“Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day.”

She turned to leave the room, for the doctor had come in. Her foot kicked the black silk hat out of her way, and sent it spinning. She picked it up, brushed the dust from it, and placed it on the dresser between two grinning dolls.