

CHAPTER IX - HAROLD SITS IN A GAME.

When Elizabeth Compton broached to her father the subject of a much-needed rest and a trip to the Orient, he laughed at her. "Why, girl," he cried, "I was never better in my life! Where in the world did you get this silly idea?"

"Harold noticed it first," she replied, "and called my attention to it; and now I can see that you really have been failing."

"Failing!" ejaculated Compton, with a scoff. "Failing nothing! You're a pair of young idiots. I'm good for twenty years more of hard work, but, as I told Harold, I would like to quit and travel, and I shall do so just as soon as I am convinced that he can take my place."

"Couldn't he do it now?" asked the girl.

"No, I am afraid not," replied Compton. "It is too much to expect of him, but I believe that in another year he will be able to."

And so Compton put an end to the suggestion that he travel for his health, and that night when Bince called she told him that she had been unable to persuade her father that he needed a rest.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you don't take it seriously enough yourself, and that you failed to impress upon him the real gravity of his condition. It is really necessary that he go--he must go."

The girl looked up quickly at the speaker, whose tones seemed unnecessarily vehement.

"I don't quite understand," she said, "why you should take the matter so to heart. Father is the best judge of his own condition, and, while he may need a rest, I cannot see that he is in any immediate danger."

"Oh, well," replied Bince irritably, "I just wanted him to get away for his own sake. Of course, it don't mean anything to me."

"What's the matter with you tonight, anyway, Harold?" she asked a half an hour later. "You're as cross and disagreeable as you can be."

"No, I'm not," he said. "There is nothing the matter with me at all."

But his denial failed to convince her, and as, unusually early, a few minutes later he left, she realized that she had spent a most unpleasant evening.

Bince went directly to his club, where he found four other men who were evidently awaiting him.

"Want to sit in a little game to-night, Harold?" asked one of them.

"Oh, hell," replied Bince, "you fellows have been sitting here all evening waiting for me. You know I want to. My luck's got to change some time."

"Sure thing it has," agreed another of the men. "You certainly have been playing in rotten luck, but when it does change--oh, baby!"

As the five men entered one of the cardrooms several of the inevitable spectators drew away from the other games and approached their table, for it was a matter of club gossip that these five played for the largest stakes of any coterie among the habitués of the card-room.

It was two o'clock in the morning before Bince disgustedly threw his cards upon the table and rose. There was a nasty expression on his face and in his mind a thing which he did not dare voice--the final crystallization of a suspicion that he had long harbored, that his companions had been for months deliberately fleecing him. Tonight he had lost five thousand dollars, nor was there a man at the table who did not hold his I. O. U's. for similar amounts.

"I'm through, absolutely through," he said. "I'll be damned if I ever touch another card."

His companions only smiled wearily, for they knew that to-morrow night he would be back at the table.

"How much of old man Compton's money did you get tonight?" asked one of the four after Bince had left the room.

"About two thousand dollars," was the reply, "which added to what I already hold, puts Mr. Compton in my debt some seven or eight thousand dollars."

Whereupon they all laughed.

"I suppose," remarked another, "that it's a damn shame, but if we don't get it some one else will."

"Is he paying anything at all?" asked another.

"Oh, yes; he comes across with something now and then, but we'll probably have to carry the bulk of it until after the wedding."

"Well, I can't carry it forever," said the first speaker. "I'm not playing here for my health," and, rising, he too left the room. Going directly to the buffet, he found Bince, as he was quite sure that he would.

"Look here, old man," he said, "I hate to seem insistent, but, on the level, I've got to have some money."

"I've told you two or three times," replied Bince, "that I'd let you have it as soon as I could get it. I can't get you any now."

"If you haven't got it, Mason Compton has," retorted the creditor, "and if you don't come across I'll go to him and get it."

Bince paled.

"You wouldn't do that, Harry?" he almost whimpered. "For God's sake, don't do that, and I'll try and see what I can do for you."

"Well," replied the other, "I don't want to be nasty, but I need some money badly."

"Give me a little longer," begged Bince, "and I'll see what I can do."

Jimmy Torrance sat a long time in thought after the Lizard left. "God!" he muttered. "I wonder what dad would say if he knew that I had come to a point where I had even momentarily considered going into partnership with a safe-blower, and that for the next two weeks I shall be compelled to subsist upon the charity of a criminal?"

"I'm sure glad that I have a college education. It has helped me materially to win to my present exalted standing in society. Oh, well I might be worse off, I suppose. At least I don't have to worry about the income tax.

"It is now October, and since the first of the year I have earned forty dollars exactly. I have also received a bequest of twenty dollars, which of course is exempt. I venture to say that there is not another able-bodied adult male in the United States the making of whose income-tax schedule would be simpler than mine."

With which philosophic trend of thought, and the knowledge that he could eat for at least two weeks longer, the erstwhile star amateur first baseman sought the doubtful comfort of his narrow, lumpy bed.

It was in the neighborhood of two o'clock the next morning that he was awakened by a gentle tapping upon the panels of his door.

"Who is it?" he asked. "What do you want?"

"It's me bo," came the whispered reply in the unmistakable tones of the Lizard.

Jimmy arose, lighted the gas, and opened the door.

"What's the matter?" he whispered.

"Are the police on your trail?"

"No," replied the Lizard, grinning. "I just dropped in to tell you that I grabbed a job for you."

"Fine!" exclaimed Jimmy. "You're a regular fellow all right."

"But you might not like the job," suggested the Lizard.

"As long as I can earn an honest dollar," cried Jimmy, striking a dramatic pose, "I care not what it may be."

The Lizard's grin broadened.

"I ain't so sure about that," he said. "I know your kind. You're a regular gent. There is some honest jobs that you would just as soon have as the smallpox, and maybe this is one of them."

"What is it?" asked Jimmy. "Don't keep me guessing any longer."

"You know Feinheimer's Cabaret."

"The basement joint on Wells Street?" asked Jimmy. "Sure I know it."

"Well, that's where I got you a job," said the Lizard.

"What doing?" asked Jimmy.

"Waiter," was the reply.

"It isn't any worse than standing behind a counter, selling stockings to women," said Jimmy.

"It ain't such a bad job," admitted the Lizard, "if a guy ain't too swelled up. Some of 'em make a pretty good thing out of it, what with their tips and short changing-
-Oh, there are lots of little ways to get yours at Feinheimer's."

"I see," said Jimmy; "but don't he pay any wages?"

"Oh, sure," replied the Lizard; "you get the union scale."

"When do I go to work?"

"Go around and see him to-morrow morning. He will put you right to work."

And so the following evening the patrons of Feinheimer's Cabaret saw a new face among the untidy servitors of the establishment--a new face and a new figure, both of which looked out of place in the atmosphere of the basement resort.

Feinheimer's Cabaret held a unique place among the restaurants of the city. Its patrons were from all classes of society. At noon its many tables were largely filled by staid and respectable business men, but at night a certain element of the underworld claimed it as their own, and there was always a sprinkling of people of the stage, artists, literary men and politicians. It was, as a certain wit described it, a social goulash, for in addition to its regular habitues there were those few who came occasionally from the upper stratum of society in the belief that they were doing something devilish. As a matter of fact, slumming parties which began and ended at Feinheimer's were of no uncommon occurrence, and as the place was more than usually orderly it was with the greatest safety that society made excursions into the underworld of crime and vice through its medium.