

CHAPTER XIII - HARRIET PHILOSOPHIZES.

When Jimmy got home that night he saw a light in the Lizard's room and entered.

"Well," said the cracksman, "how's every little thing?"

Jimmy smiled ruefully.

"Canned again," he announced, and then he told the Lizard the story of his downfall, attributing the results of the third round, however, to Brophy's unwarranted action at the end of the second.

"Well," said the Lizard, "you certainly are the champion boob. There you had a chance to cop off a nice bunch of coin on that fight and instead you kill it for yourself and everybody else."

"You don't think," said Jimmy, "that I would have put any money on that crooked scrap."

"Why not?" asked the Lizard, and then he shook his head sadly. "No, I don't suppose you would. There's lots of things about you that I can't understand, and one of them is the fact that you would rather starve to death than take a little easy money off of birds that have got more than they got any business to have. Why, with your education and front we two could pull off some of the classiest stuff that this burg ever saw."

"Forget it," admonished Jimmy.

"What are you going to do now?" asked the Lizard.

"Go out and hunt for another job," said Jimmy.

"Well, I wish you luck," said the Lizard.

"Maybe I can find something for you. I'll try, and in the mean time if you need any mazuma I always got a little roll tucked away in my sock."

"Thanks," said Jimmy, "and I don't mind telling you that you're the one man I know whom I'd just as soon borrow from and would like the opportunity of loaning to. You say that you can't understand me, and yet you're a whole lot more of an enigma yourself! You admit, in fact, you're inclined to boast, that you're a pickpocket and a safe-blower and yet I'd trust you, Lizard, with anything that I had."

The Lizard smiled, and for the first time since he had known him Jimmy noticed that his eyes smiled with his lips.

"I've always had the reputation," said the Lizard, "of being a white guy with my friends. As a matter of fact, I ain't no different from what you'd probably be if you were in business and what most of your friends are. Morally they're a bunch of thieves and crooks. Of course, they don't go out and frisk any one and they don't work with a jimmy or a bottle of soup. They work their graft with the help of contracts and lawyers, and they'd gyp a friend or a pauper almost as soon as they would an enemy. I don't know much about morality, but when it comes right down to a question of morals I believe my trade is just as decent as that of a lot of these birds you see rolling up and down Mich Boul in their limousines."

"It's all in the point of view," said Jimmy.

"Yes," said the Lizard. "It's all in the point of view, and my point of view ain't warped by no college education."

Jimmy grinned. "Eventually, Lizard, you may win me over; but when you do why fritter away our abilities upon this simple village when we have the capitals of all Europe to play around in?"

"There's something in that," said the Lizard; "but don't get it into your head for a minute that I am tryin' to drag you from the straight and narrow. I think I like you better the way you are."

"Did you ever," said Harriet Holden, "see anything so weird as the way we keep bumping into that stocking-counter young man?"

"No," said Elizabeth, "it's commencing to get on my nerves. Every time I turn a corner now I expect to bump into him. I suppose we see other people many times without recognizing them, but he is so utterly good-looking that he sort of sticks in one's memory."

"Do you know," said Harriet, "that I have a suspicion that he recognized us. I saw him looking up at us just after that other person knocked him down and I could have sworn that he blushed. And then, you know, he went in and was entirely different from what he had been in the two preceding rounds. Billy said that he is really a wonderful fighter, and there are not very many good fights that Billy misses. What in the world do you suppose his profession is anyway? Since we first noticed him he has been a hosiery clerk, a waiter, and a prize-fighter."

"I don't know, I am sure," said Elizabeth, yawning. "You seem to be terribly interested in him."

"I am," admitted Harriet frankly. "He's a regular adventure all in himself--a whole series of adventures."

"I've never been partial to serials," said Elizabeth.

"Well, I should think one would be a relief after a whole winter of heavy tragedy," retorted Harriet.

"What do you mean?" asked Elizabeth.

"Oh, I mean Harold, of course," said Harriet. "He's gone around all winter with a grouch and a face a mile long. What's the matter with him anyway?"

"I don't know," sighed Elizabeth. "I'm afraid he's working too hard."

Harriet giggled.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" she exclaimed. "You know perfectly well that Harold Bince will never work himself to death."

"Well, he is working hard, Harriet. Father says so. And he's worrying about the business, too. He's trying so hard to make good."

"I will admit that he has stuck to his job more faithfully than anybody expected him to."

Elizabeth turned slowly upon her friend, "You don't like Harold," she said; "why is it?"

Harriet shook her head.

"I do like him, Elizabeth, for your sake. I suppose the trouble is that I realize that he is not good enough for you. I have known him all my life, and even as a little child he was never sincere. Possibly he has changed now. I hope so. And then again I know as well as you do that you are not in love with him."

"How perfectly ridiculous!" cried Elizabeth. "Do you suppose that I would marry a man whom I didn't love?"

"You haven't the remotest idea what love is. You've never been in love."

"Have you?" asked Elizabeth.

"No," replied Harriet, "I haven't, but I know the symptoms and you certainly haven't got one of them. Whenever Harold isn't going to be up for dinner or for the evening you're always relieved. Possibly you don't realize it yourself, but you show it to any one who knows you."

"Well, I do love him," insisted Elizabeth, "and I intend to marry him. I never had any patience with this silly, love-sick business that requires people to pine away when they are not together and bore everybody else to death when they were."

"All of which proves," said Harriet, "that you haven't been stung yet, and I sincerely hope that you may never be unless it happens before you marry Harold."