

## **CHAPTER XIV - IN AGAIN--OUT AGAIN.**

Jimmy Torrance was out of a job a week this time, and once more he was indebted to the Lizard for a position, the latter knowing a politician who was heavily interested in a dairy company, with the result that Jimmy presently found himself driving a milk-wagon. Jimmy's route was on the north side, which he regretted, as it was in the district where a number of the friends of his former life resided. His delivery schedule, however, and the fact that his point of contact with the homes of his customers was at the back door relieved him of any considerable apprehension of being discovered by an acquaintance.

His letters home were infrequent, for he found that his powers of invention were being rapidly depleted. It was difficult to write glowing accounts of the business success he was upon the point of achieving on the strength of any of the positions he so far had held, and doubly so during the far greater period that he had been jobless and hungry. But he had not been able to bring himself to the point of admitting to his family his long weeks of consistent and unrelieved failure.

Recently he had abandoned his futile attempts to obtain positions through the medium of the Help Wanted columns.

"It is no use," he thought. "There must be something inherently wrong with me that in a city full of jobs I am unable to land anything without some sort of a pull and then only work that any unskilled laborer could perform."

The truth of the matter was that Jimmy Torrance was slowly approaching that mental condition that is aptly described by the phrase, "losing your grip," one of the symptoms of which was the fact that he was almost contented with his present job.

He had driven for about a week when, upon coming into the barn after completing his morning delivery, he was instructed to take a special order to a certain address on Lake Shore Drive. Although the address was not that of one of his regular customers he felt that there was something vaguely familiar about it, but when he finally arrived he realized that it was a residence at which he had never before called.

Driving up the alley Jimmy stopped in the rear of a large and pretentious home, and entering through a gateway in a high stone wall he saw that the walk to the rear entrance bordered a very delightful garden. He realized what a wonderfully pretty little spot it must be in the summer time, with its pool and fountain and tree-shaded benches, its vine-covered walls and artistically arranged shrubs, and it recalled to Jimmy with an accompanying sigh the homes in which he had visited in what seemed now a remote past, and also of his own home in the West.

On the alley in one corner of the property stood a garage and stable, in which Jimmy could see men working upon the owner's cars and about the box-stalls of his saddle horses. At the sight of the horses Jimmy heaved another sigh as he continued his way to the rear entrance. As he stood waiting for a reply to his summons he glanced back at the stable to see that horses had just entered and that their riders were dismounting, evidently two of the women of the household, and then a houseman opened the door and Jimmy made his delivery and started to retrace his steps to his wagon.

Approaching him along the walk from the stable were the riders--two young women, laughing and talking as they approached the house, and suddenly Jimmy, in his neat white suit, carrying his little tray of milk-bottles, recognized them, and instantly there flashed into recollection the address that Harriet Holden had given him that night at Feinheimer's.

"What infernal luck," he groaned inwardly; "I suppose the next time I see that girl I'll be collecting garbage from her back door." And then, with his eyes straight to the front, he stepped aside to let the two pass.

It was Harriet Holden who recognized him first, and stopped with a little exclamation of surprise. Jimmy stopped, too. There was nothing else that a gentleman might do, although he would have given his right hand to have been out of the yard.

"You never came to the house as I asked you to," said Miss Holden reproachfully. "We wanted so much to do something to repay you for your protection that night."

"There was no use in my coming," said Jimmy, "for, you see, I couldn't have accepted anything for what I did--I couldn't very well have done anything else, could I, under the circumstances?"

"There were many other men in the place," replied Harriet, "but you were the only one who came to our help."

"But the others were not---" Jimmy been upon the point of saying gentlemen, but then he happened to think that in the eyes of these two girls, and according to their standard, he might not be a gentleman, either. "Well, you see," he continued lamely, "they probably didn't know who you were."

"Did you?" asked Elizabeth.

"No," Jimmy admitted, "of course, I didn't know who you were, but I knew what you were not, which was the thing that counted most then."

"I wish," said Harriet, "that you would let us do something for you."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "if a hundred dollars would be of any use to you--" Harriet laid a hand quickly on her friend's arm.

"I wasn't thinking of money," she said to Jimmy. "One can't pay for things like that with money, but we know so many people here we might help you in some way, if you are not entirely satisfied with your present position."

Out of the corner of his eye Jimmy could not help but note that Elizabeth was appraising him critically from head to foot and he felt that he could almost read what was passing through her mind as she took stock of his cheap cotton uniform and his cap, with the badge of his employer above the visor. Involuntarily Jimmy straightened his shoulders and raised his chin a trifle.

"No, thank you," he said to Harriet, "it is kind of you, but really I am perfectly satisfied with my present job. It is by far the best one I have ever held," and touching his cap, he continued his interrupted way to his wagon.

"What a strange young man," exclaimed Harriet. "He is like many of his class," replied Elizabeth, "probably entirely without ambition and with no desire to work any too hard or to assume additional responsibilities."

"I don't believe it," retorted Harriet. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, that man is a gentleman. Everything about him indicates it; his inflection even is that of a well-bred man."

"How utterly silly," exclaimed Elizabeth. "You've heard him speak scarcely a dozen words. I venture to say that in a fifteen-minute conversation he would commit more horrible crimes against the king's English than even that new stable-boy of yours. Really, Harriet, you seem very much interested in this person."

"Why shouldn't I be?" asked Harriet. "He's becoming my little pet mystery. I wonder under what circumstances we see him next?"

"Probably as a white-wings," laughed Elizabeth. "But if so I positively refuse to permit you to stop in the middle of Michigan Boulevard and converse with a street-sweeper while I'm with you."

Jimmy's new job lasted two weeks, and then the milk-wagon drivers went on strike and Jimmy was thrown out of employment.

"Tough luck," sympathized the Lizard. "You sure are the Calamity Kid. But don't worry, we'll land you something else. And remember that that partnership proposition is still open."

There ensued another month of idleness, during which Jimmy again had recourse to the Help Wanted column. The Lizard tried during the first week to find something for him, and then occurred a certain very famous safe-robbery, and the Lizard disappeared.