

CHAPTER XXIII - LAID UP.

Harriet Holden was sitting in Elizabeth's boudoir. "And he had the effrontery," the latter was saying, "to tell me what I must do and must not do! The idea! A miserable little milk-wagon driver dictating to me!"

Miss Holden smiled.

"I should not call him very little," she remarked.

"I didn't mean physically," retorted Elizabeth. "It is absolutely insufferable. I am going to demand that father discharge the man."

"And suppose he asks you why?" asked Harriet. "You will tell him, of course, that you want this person discharged because he protected you from the insults and attacks of a ruffian while you were dining in Feinheimer's at night--is that it?"

"You are utterly impossible, Harriet!" cried Elizabeth, stamping her foot. "You are as bad as that efficiency person. But, then, I might have expected it! You have always, it seems to me, shown a great deal more interest in the fellow than necessary, and probably the fact that Harold doesn't like him is enough to make you partial toward him, for you have never tried to hide the fact that you don't like Harold."

"If you're going to be cross," said Harriet, "I think I shall go home."

At about the same time the Lizard entered Feinheimer's. In the far corner of the room Murray was seated at a table. The Lizard approached and sat down opposite

him. "Here I am," he said. "What do you want, and how did you know I was in town?"

"I didn't know," said Murray. "I got a swell job for you, and so I sent out word to get you."

"You're in luck then," said the Lizard. "I just blew in this morning. What kind of a job you got?"

Murray explained at length.

"They got a watchman," he concluded, "but I've got a guy on de inside that'll fix him."

"When do I pull this off?" asked the Lizard.

"In about a week. I'll let you know the night later. Dey ordinarily draw the payroll money Monday, the same day dey pay, but dis week they'll draw it Saturday and leave it in the safe. It'll be layin' on top of a bunch of books and papers. Dey're de t'ings you're to destroy. As I told you, it will all be fixed from de inside. Dere's no danger of a pinch. All you gotta do is crack de safe, put about a four or five t'ousand dollar roll in your pocket, and as you cross de river drop a handful of books and papers in. Nothin' to it--it's the easiest graft you ever had."

"You're sure dat's all?" asked the Lizard.

"Sure thing!" replied Murray.

"Where's de place?"

"Dat I can't tell you until the day we're ready to pull off de job."

At four o'clock that afternoon Jimmy Torrance collapsed at his desk. The flu had struck him as suddenly and as unexpectedly as it had attacked many of its victims. Edith Hudson found him, and immediately notified Mr. Compton, with the result that half an hour later Jimmy Torrance was in a small private hospital in Park Avenue.

That night Bince got Murray over the phone. He told him of Jimmy's sickness.

"He's balled up the whole plan," he complained. "We've either got to wait until he croaks or is out again before we can go ahead, unless something else arises to make it necessary to act before. I think I can hold things off, though, at this end, all right."

For four or five days Jimmy was a pretty sick man. He was allowed to see no one, but even if Jimmy had been in condition to give the matter any thought he would not have expected to see any one, for who was there to visit him in the hospital, who was there who knew of his illness, to care whether he was sick or well, alive or dead? It was on the fifth day that Jimmy commenced to take notice of anything. At Compton's orders he had been placed in a private room and given a special nurse, and to-day for the first time he learned of Mr. Compton's kindness and the fact that the nurse was instructed to call Jimmy's employer twice a day and report the patient's condition.

"Mighty nice of him," thought Jimmy, and then to the nurse: "And the flowers, too? Does he send those?"

The young woman shook her head negatively.

"No," she said; "a young lady comes every evening about six and leaves the flowers. She always asks about your condition and when she may see you."

Jimmy was silent for some time. "She comes every evening?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the nurse.

"May I see her this evening?" asked Jimmy.

"We'll ask the doctor," she replied; and the doctor must have given consent, for at six o'clock that evening the nurse brought Edith Hudson to his bedside.

The girl came every evening thereafter and sat with Jimmy as long as the nurse would permit her to remain. Jimmy discovered during those periods a new side to her character, a mothering tenderness that filled him with a feeling of content and happiness the moment that she entered the room, and which doubtless aided materially in his rapid convalescence, for until she had been permitted to see him Jimmy had suffered as much from mental depression as from any other of the symptoms of his disease.

He had felt utterly alone and uncared for, and in this mental state he had brooded over his failures to such an extent that he had reached a point where he felt that death would be something of a relief. Militating against his recovery had been the parting words of Elizabeth Compton the evening that he had dined at her father's home, but now all that was very nearly forgotten--at least crowded

into the dim vistas of recollection by the unselfish friendship of this girl of the streets.

Jimmy's nurse quite fell in love with Edith.

"She is such a sweet girl," she said, "and always so cheerful. She is going to make some one a mighty good wife," and she smiled knowingly at Jimmy.

The suggestion which her words implied came to Jimmy as a distinct shock. He had never thought of Edith Hudson in the light of this suggestion, and now he wondered if there could be any such sentiment as it implied in Edith's heart, but finally he put the idea away with a shrug.

"Impossible," he thought. "She thinks of me as I think of her, only as a good friend."