

CHAPTER III - THE LIZARD.

That night Jimmy attended a show, and treated himself to a lonely dinner afterward. He should have liked very much to have looked up some of his friends. A telephone call would have brought invitations to dinner and a pleasant evening with convivial companions, but he had mapped his course and he was determined to stick to it to the end.

"There will be plenty of time," he thought, "for amusement after I have gotten a good grasp of my new duties." Jimmy elected to walk from the theater to his hotel, and as he was turning the corner from Randolph into La Salle a young man jostled him. An instant later the stranger was upon his knees, his wrist doubled suddenly backward and very close to the breaking-point.

"Wot t' hell yuh doin'?" he screamed.

"Pardon me," replied Jimmy: "you got your hand in the wrong pocket. I suppose you meant to put it in your own, but you didn't."

"Aw, g'wan; lemme go," pleaded the stranger. "I didn't get nuthin'-- you ain't got the goods on me."

Now, such a tableau as Jimmy and his new acquaintance formed cannot be staged at the corner of Randolph and La Salle beneath an arc light, even at midnight, without attracting attention. And so it was that before Jimmy realized it a dozen curious pedestrians were approaching them from different directions, and a burly blue-coated figure was shouldering his way forward.

Jimmy had permitted his captive to rise, but he still held tightly to his wrist as the officer confronted them. He took one look at Jimmy's companion, and then grabbed him roughly by the arm. "So, it's you again, is it?" he growled.

"I ain't done nuthin'," muttered the man.

The officer looked inquiringly at Jimmy.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked the latter. "My friend and I have done nothing."

"Your fri'nd and you?" replied the policeman. "He ain't no fri'nd o' yours, or yez wouldn't be sayin' so."

"Well, I'll admit," replied Jimmy, "that possibly I haven't known him long enough to presume to claim any close friendship, but there's no telling what time may develop."

"You don't want him pinched?" asked the policeman.

"Of course not," replied Jimmy. "Why should he be pinched?"

The officer turned roughly upon the stranger, shook him viciously a few times, and then gave him a mighty shove which all but sent him sprawling into the gutter.

"G'wan wid yez," he yelled after him, "and if I see ye on this beat again I'll run yez in. An' you"--he turned upon Jimmy--"ye'd bettther be on your way--and not be afther makin' up with ivery dip ye meet."

"Thanks," said Jimmy. "Have a cigar."

After the officer had helped himself and condescended to relax his stern features into the semblance of a smile the young man bid him good night and resumed his way toward the hotel.

"Pretty early to go to bed," he thought as he reached for his watch to note the time, running his fingers into an empty pocket. Gingerly he felt in another pocket, where he knew his watch couldn't possibly be, nor was. Carefully Jimmy examined each pocket of his coat and trousers, a slow and broad grin illumining his face.

"What do you know about that?" he mused. "And I thought I was a wise guy."

A few minutes after Jimmy reached his room the office called him on the telephone to tell him that a man had called to see him.

"Send him up," said Jimmy, wondering who it might be, since he was sure that no one knew of his presence in the city. He tried to connect the call in some way with his advertisement, but inasmuch as that had been inserted blind he felt that there could be no possible connection between that and his caller.

A few minutes later there was a knock on his door, and in response to his summons to enter the door opened, and there stood before him the young man of his recent encounter upon the street. The latter entered softly, closing the door

behind him. His feet made no sound upon the carpet, and no sound came from the door as he closed it, nor any slightest click from the latch. His utter silence and the stealth of his movements were so pronounced as to attract immediate attention. He did not speak until he had reached the center of the room and halted on the opposite side of the table at which Jimmy was standing; and then a very slow smile moved his lips, though the expression of his eyes remained unchanged.

"Miss anything?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"Here it is," said the visitor, laying the other's watch upon the table.

"Why this spasm of virtue?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the other. "I guess it's because you're a white guy. O'Donnell has been trying to get something on me for the last year. He's got it in for me--I wouldn't cough every time the big stiff seen me."

"Sit down," said Jimmy.

"Naw," said the other; "I gotta be goin'."

"Come," insisted the host; "sit down for a few minutes at least. I was just wishing that I had someone to talk to."

The other sank noiselessly into a chair. "All right, bo," he said.

Jimmy proffered him his cigar-case.

"No, thanks," declined the visitor. "I'd rather have a coffin-nail," which Jimmy forthwith furnished.

"I should think," said Jimmy, "that your particular line of endeavor would prove rather hazardous in a place where you are known by the police."

The other smiled and, as before, with his lips alone.

"Naw," he said; "this is the safest place to work. If ten per cent of the bulls know me I got that much on them, and then some, because any boob can spot any one o' de harness bunch, and I know nearly every fly on the department. They're the guys yuh gotta know, and usually I know something besides their names, too," and again his lips smiled.

"How much of your time do you have to put in at your occupation to make a living?" asked Jimmy.

"Sometimes I put in six or eight hours a day," replied the visitor. "De rush hours on de surface line are usually good for two or t'ree hours a day, but I been layin' off dat stuff lately and goin' in fer de t'ater crowd. Dere's more money and shorter hours."

"You confine yourself," asked Jimmy, "to--er--ah--pocket-picking solely?"

Again the lip smile. "I'll tell youse sumpin', bo, dat dey don't none o' dem big stiffs on de department know. De dip game is a stall. I learned it when I was a kid, an' dese yaps t'ink dat's all I know, and I keep dem t'inkin' it by pullin' stuff under der noses often enough to give 'em de hunch dat I'm still at de same ol' business." He leaned confidentially across the table. "If you ever want a box cracked, look up the Lizard."

"Meaning?" asked Jimmy.

"Me, bo, I'm the Lizard."

"Box cracked?" repeated Jimmy. "An ice-box or a hot box?"

His visitor grinned. "Safe," he explained.

"Oh," said Jimmy, "if I ever want any one to break into a safe, come to you, huh?"

"You get me," replied the other.

"All right," said Jimmy, laughing, "I'll call on you. That the only name you got, Mr. Lizard?"

"That's all--just the Lizard. Now I gotta be beatin' it."

"Goin' to crack a box?" asked Jimmy.

The other smiled his lip smile and turned toward the door.

"Wait a second," said Jimmy. "What would you have gotten on this watch of mine?"

"It would have stood me about twenty bucks."

Jimmy reached into his pocket and drew forth a roll of bills. "Here," he said, handing the other two tens.

"Naw," said the Lizard, shoving the proffered money away. "I'm no cheap skate."

"Come on--take it," said Jimmy. "I may want a box cracked some day."

"All right," said the Lizard, "if you put it that way, bo."

"I should think," said Jimmy, "that a man of your ability could earn a living by less precarious methods."

"You would think so," replied the Lizard. "I've tried two or three times to go straight. Wore out my shoes looking for a job. Never landed anything that paid me more than ten bucks per, and worked nine or ten hours a day, and half the time I couldn't get that."

"I suppose the police hounded you all the time, too," suggested Jimmy.

"Naw," said the Lizard; "dat's all bunk. De fellows that couldn't even float down a sewer straight pull dat. Once in a while dey get it in for some guy, but dey're glad enough to leave us alone if we leave dem alone. I worked four hours to-day, maybe six before I get through, and I'll stand a chance of makin' all the way from fifty dollars to five thousand. Suppose I was drivin' a milk-wagon, gettin' up at t'ree o'clock in the mornin' and workin' like hell--how much would I get out of dat? Expectin' every minute some one was goin' tuh fire me. Nuthin' doin'--dey can't nobody fire me now. I'm my own boss."

"Well," said Jimmy, "your logic sounds all right, but it all depends upon the viewpoint. But I'll tell you: you've offered me your services; I'll offer you mine. Whenever you want a job, look me up. I'm going to be general manager of a big concern here, and you'll find me in the next issue of the telephone directory." He handed the Lizard his card.

"Tanks," said the latter. "If you don't want a box cracked any sooner than I want a job, the chances are we will never meet again. So-long," and he was gone as noiselessly as he had come.

Jimmy breakfasted at nine the next morning, and as he waited for his bacon and eggs he searched the Situations Wanted columns of the morning paper until his eye finally alighted upon that for which he sought--the ad that was to infuse into the business life of the great city a new and potent force. Before his breakfast was served Jimmy had read the few lines over a dozen times, and with each succeeding reading he was more and more pleased with the result of his advertising ability as it appeared in print.

WANTED--By College Graduate--Position as General Manager of Large Business where ability, energy and experience will be appreciated.
Address 263-S, Tribune Office.

He had decided to wait until after lunch before calling at the newspaper office for replies to his advertisement, but during breakfast it occurred to him there probably would be several alert prospective employers who would despatch their replies by special messengers, and realizing that promptness was one of the cardinal virtues in the business world, Jimmy reasoned that it would make a favorable impression were he to present himself as soon as possible after the receipt of replies.

By a simple system of reasoning he deduced that ten o'clock would be none too early to expect some returns from his ad, and therefore at ten promptly he presented himself at the Want Ad Department in the Tribune office.

Comparing the number of the receipt which Jimmy handed him with the numbers upon a file of little pigeonholes, the clerk presently turned back toward the counter with a handful of letters.

"Whew!" thought Jimmy. "I never would have guessed that I would receive a bunch like that so early in the morning." But then, as he saw the clerk running through them one by one, he realized that they were not all for him, and as the young man ran through them Jimmy's spirits dropped a notch with each letter that was passed over without being thrown out to him, until, when the last letter had passed beneath the scrutiny of the clerk, and the advertiser realized that he had received no replies, he was quite sure that there was some error.

"Nothing," said the clerk, shaking his head negatively.

"Are you sure you looked in the right compartment?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure," replied the clerk. "There is nothing for you."

Jimmy pocketed his slip and walked from the office. "This town is slower than I thought it was," he mused. "I guess they do need some live wires here to manage their business."

At noon he returned, only to be again disappointed, and then at two o'clock, and when he came in at four the same clerk looked up wearily and shook his head.

"Nothing for you," he said. "I distributed all the stuff myself since you were in last."

As Jimmy stood there almost dazed by surprise that during an entire day his ad had appeared in Chicago's largest newspaper, and he had not received one reply, a man approached the counter, passed a slip similar to Jimmy's to the clerk, and received fully a hundred letters in return. Jimmy was positive now that something was wrong.

"Are you sure," he asked the clerk, "that my replies haven't been sidetracked somewhere? I have seen people taking letters away from here all day, and that bird there just walked off with a fistful."

The clerk grinned. "What you advertising for?" he asked.

"A position," replied Jimmy.

"That's the answer," explained the clerk. "That fellow there was advertising for help."