

CHAPTER XXVI - "THE ONLY FRIENDS HE HAS."

So it befell that the next day a well-known criminal attorney called on Jimmy Torrance at the county jail. "I understand," he said to Jimmy, "that you have retained no attorney. I have been instructed by one of my clients to take your case."

Jimmy looked at him in silence for a moment.

"Who is going to pay you?" he asked with a smile. "I understand attorneys expect to be paid."

"That needn't worry you!" replied the lawyer.

"You mean that your client is going to pay for my defense? What's his name?"

"That I am not permitted to tell you," replied the lawyer.

"Very well. Tell your client that I appreciate his kindness, but I cannot accept it."

"Don't be a fool," said the attorney. "This client of mine can well afford the expense, and anyway, my instructions are to defend you whether you want me to or not, so I guess you can't help yourself."

Jimmy laughed with the lawyer. "All right," he said. "The first thing I wish you'd do is to get Miss Hudson out of jail. There is doubtless some reason for suspicion attaching to me because I was found alone with Mr. Compton's body, and the

pistol with which he was shot was one that had been given to me and which I kept in my desk, but there is no earthly reason why she should be detained. She could have had absolutely nothing to do with it."

"I will see what can be done," replied the attorney, "although I had no instructions to defend her also."

"I will make that one of the conditions under which I will accept your services," said Jimmy.

The result was that within a few days Edith was released. From the moment that she left the jail she was aware that she was being shadowed.

"I suppose," she thought, "that they expect to open up a fund of new clues through me," but she was disturbed nevertheless, because she realized that it was going to make difficult a thing that she had been trying to find some means to accomplish ever since she had been arrested.

She went directly to her apartment and presently took down the telephone-receiver, and after calling a public phone in a building down-town, she listened intently while the operator was getting her connection, and before the connection was made she hung up the receiver with a smile, for she had distinctly heard the sound of a man's breathing over the line, and she knew that in all probability O'Donnell had tapped in immediately on learning that she had been released from jail.

That evening she attended a local motion-picture theater which she often frequented. It was one of those small affairs, the width of a city block, with a narrow aisle running down either side and an emergency exit upon the alley at the far end of each aisle. The theater was darkened when she entered and, a

quick glance appraising her that no one followed her in immediately, she continued on down one of the side aisles and passed through the doorway into the alley.

Five minutes later she was in a telephone-booth in a drug-store two blocks away.

"Is this Feinheimer's?" she asked after she had got her connection. "I want to talk to Carl." She asked for Carl because she knew that this man who had been head-waiter at Feinheimer's for years would know her voice.

"Is that you, Carl?" she asked as a man's voice finally answered the telephone. "This is Little Eva."

"Oh, hello!" said the man. "I thought you were over at the county jail."

"I was released to-day," she explained. "Well, listen, Carl; I've got to see the Lizard. I've simply got to see him to-night. I was being shadowed, but I got away from them. Do you know where he is?"

"I guess I could find him," said Carl in a low voice. "You go out to Mother Kruger's. I'll tell him you'll be there in about an hour."

"I'll be waiting in a taxi outside," said the girl.

"Good," said Carl. "If he isn't there in an hour you can know that he was afraid to come. He's layin' pretty low."

"All right," said the girl, "I'll be there. You tell him that he simply must come." She hung up the receiver and then called a taxi. She gave a number on a side street about a half block away, where she knew it would be reasonably dark, and consequently less danger of detection.

Three-quarters of an hour later her taxi drew up beside Mother Kruger's, but the girl did not alight. She had waited but a short time when another taxi swung in beside the road-house, turned around and backed up alongside hers. A man stepped out and peered through the glass of her machine. It was the Lizard.

Recognizing the girl he opened the door and took a seat beside her. "Well," inquired the Lizard, "What's on your mind?"

"Jimmy," replied the girl.

"I thought so," returned the Lizard. "It looks pretty bad for him, don't it? I wish there was some way to help him."

"He did not do it," said the girl.

"It didn't seem like him," said the Lizard, "but I got it straight from a guy who knows that he done it all right."

"Who?" asked Edith.

"Murray."

"I thought he knew a lot about it," said the girl. "That's why I sent for you. You haven't got any love for Murray, have you?"

"No," replied the Lizard; "not so you could notice it."

"I think Murray knows a lot about that job. If you want to help Jimmy I know where you can get the dope that will start something, anyway."

"What is it?" asked the Lizard.

"This fellow Bince, who is assistant general manager for Compton, got a letter from Murray two or three weeks before Compton was killed. Murray enclosed a threat signed I.W.W., and his letter instructed Bince to show the threat to Compton. I haven't got all the dope on it, but I've got a hunch that in some way it is connected with this job. Anyway, I've got both Murray's letter and the threat he enclosed. They're hidden in my desk at the plant. I can't get them, of course; they wouldn't let me in the place now, and Murray's so strong with the police that I wouldn't trust them, so I haven't told any one. What I want is for you to go there to-night and get them."

The Lizard was thinking fast. The girl knew nothing of his connection with the job. She did not know that he had entered Compton's office and had been first to find his dead body; in fact, no one knew that. Even Murray did not know that the Lizard had succeeded in entering the plant, as the latter had told him that he was delayed, and that when he reached there a patrol and ambulance were already backed up in front of the building. He felt that he had enough knowledge, however, to make the conviction of Jimmy a very difficult proposition, but if he divulged the knowledge he had and explained how he came by it he could readily see that suspicion would be at once transferred from Jimmy to himself.

The Lizard therefore was in a quandary. Of course, if Murray's connection was ever discovered the Lizard might then be drawn into it, but if he could keep Murray out the Lizard would be reasonably safe from suspicion, and now the girl had shown him how he might remove a damaging piece of evidence against Murray.

"You will get it, won't you?" asked the girl.

"Where are these papers?" he asked.

"They are in the outer office which adjoins Mr. Compton's. My desk stands at the right of the door as you enter from the main office. Remove the right-hand lower drawer and you will find the papers lying on the little wooden partition directly underneath the drawer."

"All right," said the Lizard; "I'll get them."

"Bless you, Lizard," cried the girl. "I knew you would help. You and I are the only friends he has. If we went back on him he'd be sent up, for there's lots of money being used against him. He might even be hanged. I know from what I have heard that the prosecuting attorney intends to ask for the death penalty."

The Lizard made no reply as he started to leave the taxi.

"Take them to his attorney," said the girl, and she gave him the name and address.

The Lizard grunted and entered his own cab. As he did so a man on a motorcycle drew up on the opposite side and peered through the window. The driver had started his motor as the newcomer approached. From her cab the girl saw the Lizard and the man on the motorcycle look into each other's face for a moment, then she heard the Lizard's quick admonition to his driver, "Beat it, bo!"

A sharp "Halt!" came from the man on the motorcycle, but the taxicab leaped forward, and, accelerating rapidly, turned to the left into the road toward the city. The girl had guessed at the first glance that the man on the motorcycle was a police officer. As the Lizard's taxi raced away the officer circled quickly and started in pursuit. "No chance," thought the girl. "He'll get caught sure." She could hear the staccato reports from the open exhaust of the motorcycle diminishing rapidly in the distance, indicating the speed of the pursued and the pursuer.

And then from the distance came a shot and then another and another. She leaned forward and spoke to her own driver. "Go on to Elmhurst," she said, "and then come back to the city on the St. Charles Road."

It was after two o'clock in the morning when the Lizard entered an apartment on Ashland Avenue which he had for several years used as a hiding-place when the police were hot upon his trail. The people from whom he rented the room were eminently respectable Jews who thought their occasional roomer what he represented himself to be, a special agent for one of the federal departments, a vocation which naturally explained the Lizard's long absences and unusual hours.

Once within his room the Lizard sank into a chair and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, although it was by no means a warm night. He drew a folded paper from his inside pocket, which, when opened, revealed a small piece of wrapping paper within. They were Murray's letter to Bince and the enclosure.

"Believe me," muttered the Lizard, "that was the toughest job I ever pulled off and all I gets is two pieces of paper, but I don't know but what they're worth it."

He sat for a long time looking at the papers in his hand, but he did not see them. He was thinking of other things: of prison walls that he had eluded so far through years of crime; of O'Donnell, whom he knew to be working on the Compton case and whose boast it had been that sooner or later he would get the Lizard; of what might naturally be expected were the papers in his hands to fall into the possession of Torrance's attorney. It would mean that Murray would be immediately placed in jeopardy, and the Lizard knew Murray well enough to know that he would sacrifice his best friend to save himself, and the Lizard was by no means Murray's best friend.

He realized that he knew more about the Compton murder case than any one else. He was of the opinion that he could clear it up if he were almost any one other than the Lizard, but with the record of his past life against him, would any one believe him? In order to prove his assertion it would be necessary to make admissions that might incriminate himself, and there would be Murray and the Compton millions against him; and as he pondered these things there ran always through his mind the words of the girl, "You and I are the only friends he has."

"Hell," ejaculated the Lizard as he rose from his chair and prepared for bed.