THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE

by

FRANK L. PACKARD

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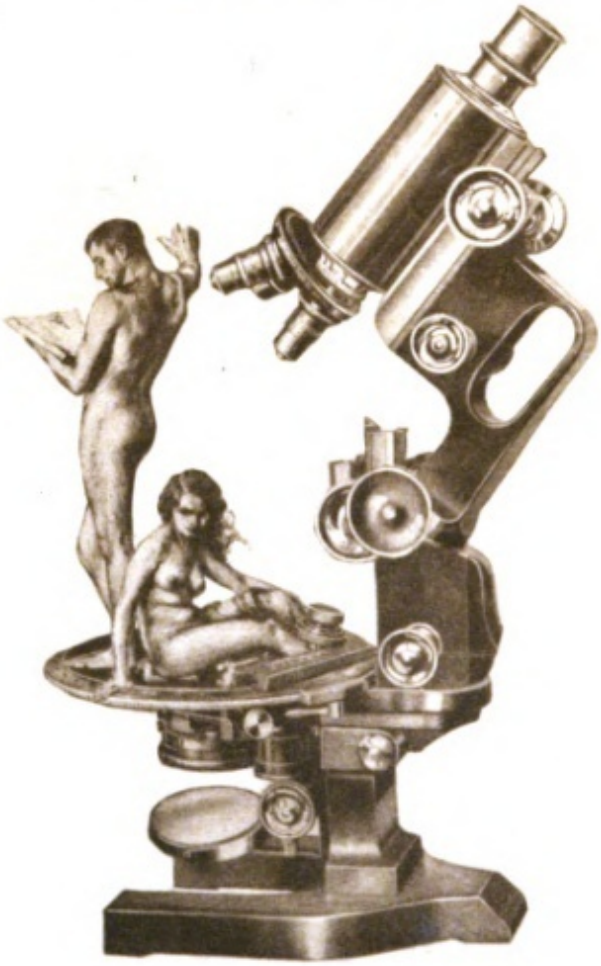

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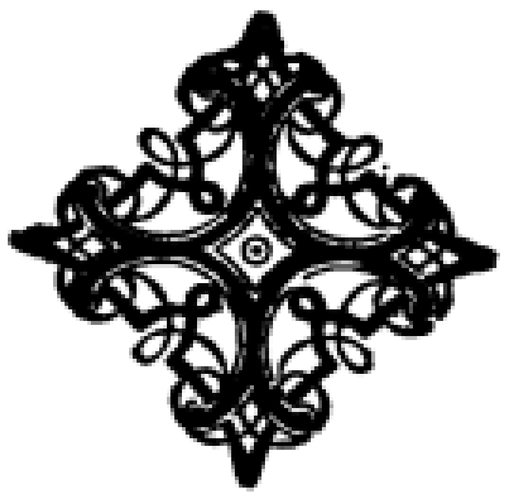
The Further Adventures of Jimmie Dale

By FRANK L. PACKARD

AUTHOR OF

"The Adventures of Jimmie Dale,"
"The Wire Devils,"
"The Sin that was His," Etc.



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CHAPTER I

SMARLINGHUE

A DIMINUTIVE gas-jet's sickly, yellow flame illuminated the room with poverty-stricken inadequacy; high up on the wall, bordering the ceiling, the moonlight, as though contemptuous of its artificial competitor, streamed in through a small, square window, and laid a white, flickering path to the door across a filthy and disreputable rag of carpet; also, through a rent in the roller shade, which was drawn over a sort of antiquated French window that opened on a level with the floor and in line with the top-light, the moonlight disclosed a narrow and squalid courtyard without.

In one corner of the room stood a battered easel, while against the wall near it, and upon the floor, were a number of canvases of different sizes. A cot bed, unmade, its covers dirty and in disorder, occupied the wall space opposite the door. In the centre of the mean and uninviting apartment stood a table, its top littered with odds and ends, amongst which the remains of a meal, dishes and food, fraternised gregariously with a painter's palette, brushes and paint tubes. A chair or two, long since disabled, and a rickety washstand completed the appointments.

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The moonlight's path across the floor wavered suddenly, the door opened, was locked again, and with a quick, catlike step a man moved along the side of the wall where the shadows lay thickest near the door, dropped on his knees, and began to fumble hurriedly with the base-board of the wall, pausing at every alternate second to listen intently.

A minute passed. A section of the base-board was lifted out, the man's hand was thrust inside—and emerged again with a large roll of banknotes. He turned his head for a quick glance around the room, his eyes, burning out of a gaunt, hollow-cheeked, pallid face, held on the torn window shade—and then, in almost frantic haste, he thrust the banknotes back inside the wall, and began to replace the base-board. But it was not the window shade, nor yet the courtyard without with which he was concerned—it was the sound of a heavy footstep outside the door.

And now the door was tried. The man on the floor, working with desperate energy to replace the base-board, coughed in an asthmatic, wheezing way, as there came the imperative smashing of a fist upon the door panels, coupled with a gruff, curt demand for admittance. Again the man coughed—to drown perhaps the slight rasping sound as the base-board slid back into place—and, rising to his feet, shuffled hastily to the door and unlocked it.

The door was flung violently open from without, a heavy-built, clean-shaven, sharp-featured man stepped into the room, slammed the door shut behind him, relocked it, and swept a shrewd, inquisitive, suspicious glance about the place.

"It took you a damned long time to open that door, *Mister* Smarlinghue!" he said sharply.

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The man addressed touched his lips with the tip of his tongue nervously, shrank back, and made no reply.

The lapel of the visitor's coat thrown carelessly back displayed a police shield on the vest beneath; and now, completing a preliminary survey of the surroundings, the man's eyes narrowed on Smarlinghue.

"I guess you know who I am, don't you? Heard of me perhaps, too—eh? Clancy of headquarters is my name!" He laughed menacingly, unpleasantly.

Smarlinghue's clothes were threadbare and ill-fitting; his coat was a size too small for him, and from the short sleeves protruded blatantly the frayed and soiled wristbands of his shirt. He twined his hands together anxiously, and retreated further back into the room.

"I haven't done anything, honest to God, I haven't!" he whined.

"Ain't, eh?" The other laughed again. "No, of course not! Nobody ever did! But now I'm here—just dropped in socially, you know—I'll have a look around."

He began to move about the room. Smarlinghue, still twining his hands in a helpless, frightened way, still circling his lips nervously with the tip of his tongue, followed the other's movements in miserable apprehension with his eyes.

Clancy, as he had introduced himself, shot up the roller shade, peered out into the courtyard, yanked the shade down again with a callous jerk that almost tore it from its fastenings, and strode over toward the easel, contemptuously kicking a chair that happened to be in his way over onto the floor. Reaching the easel he picked up the canvas that rested upon it, stared at it for a moment—and with a grunt of disdain flung it away from him to the ground.

There was a crash as it struck the floor, a ripping

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sound as the canvas split, and with a pitiful cry Smarlinghue rushed forward and snatched it up.

"It—it was sold," he choked. "I—I was to get the money to-morrow. I have had bad luck for a month—nothing sold but this—and now—and now——" He drew himself up suddenly, and, with the ruined painting clutched to his breast, shook his other fist wildly. "You have no right here!" he screamed in fury. "Do you hear! I have not done anything! I tell you, I have not done anything! You have no right here! I will make you pay for this! I will! I will!" His voice was rising in a shrill falsetto. "I will make you——"

"You hold your tongue," growled Clancy savagely, "or I'll give you something more than an old chromo to make a row about! I don't want any mass meeting of your kind of citizens. Get that?" He caught Smarlinghue roughly by the shoulder, and pushed him into a chair near the table. "Sit down there, and close your jaw!"

Cowed, Smarlinghue's voice dropped to a mumble, and he let the torn canvas slip from his fingers to the floor.

Clancy laughed gruffly, pulled another chair to the opposite side of the table, sat down himself, and eyed Smarlinghue coldly for a moment.

"Sold it, eh?" he observed grimly. "How much were you going to get for it?"

A cunning gleam flashed in Smarlinghue's eyes—and vanished instantly. He wet his lips with his tongue again.

"Ten dollars," he said hoarsely.

Clancy brushed aside the litter on the table, and nonchalantly laid down a ten-dollar bill.

With a sharp little cry that brought on a fit of coughing, Smarlinghue stretched out his hand for the money eagerly.

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Clancy drew the money back out of reach.

"Oh, no, nothing like that!" he drawled unpleasantly. "Don't make the mistake of taking me for a fool. I'm not buying any ten-cent art treasures at ten dollars a throw!"

Smarlinghue's eyes remained greedily riveted on the ten-dollar note. He began to twine his hands together once more.

"I don't know what you mean," he muttered tremulously.

"Don't you!" retorted the other shortly. "Well, I mean exactly what I say. I'm not buying any pictures, I'm buying—*you*. I have been keeping an eye on you for the last three or four months. You're just the guy I've been looking for. As far as I can make out, there ain't a dive or a roost in the Bad Lands where you don't get the glad hand—eh?"

"I—I haven't done anything! Not a thing! I—I swear I haven't!" Smarlinghue burst out frantically.

"Aw, forget it!" Clancy permitted a thin smile to flicker contemptuously across his lips. "You've got a whole lot of friends that I'm interested in. Get the idea? There ain't a crook in New York that's shy of you. You got a 'stand-in' everywhere." He held up the ten-dollar bill. "There's more of these—plenty of 'em."

Smarlinghue pushed back his chair now in a frightened sort of way.

"You—you mean you want me for—for a stool pigeon?" he faltered.

"You got it!" said Clancy bluntly.

Smarlinghue's eyes roved about the room in a furtive, terror-stricken glance, his hand passed aimlessly over his eyes, and he crouched low down in his chair.

"No, no!" he whispered. "No, no—for God's sake, Mr. Clancy, don't ask me to do that! I can't—I can't!

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I—I wouldn't be any good. I—I can't! I—I won't!"

Clancy thrust head and shoulders aggressively across the table.

"You will—if you know what's good for you!" he said evenly. "And, what's more, there's a little job you're going to break your hand in on to-night."

"No! No, no! I can't! I can't!" Smarlinghue flung out his arms imploringly.

Clancy lowered his voice.

"Cut that out!" he snapped viciously. "What's the matter with you! You'll be well paid for it—*and have police protection.* You ought to know what that'll mean to you—eh? You live like a gutter-snipe here—half starved most of the time, for all you can get out of those ungodly daubs!"

A curious dignity came to Smarlinghue. He sat upright.

"It is my art," he said. "I have starved for it many years. Some day I will get recognition. Some day I——"

"Art—hell!" sneered Clancy; and then he laughed coarsely, as, his fingers prodding under the miscellany of articles on the table, he suddenly held up a hypodermic syringe. "This is *your* art, my bucko! Why, you poor boob, don't you think I know you! Cocaine's the one thing on earth you live for. You're stewed to the eyes with it now. Here, just watch me! Suppose"—he caught the syringe in a quick grip between the fingers of both hands—"suppose I just put this little toy out of commission now, and——"

With a shrill screech, Smarlinghue sprang from his chair, and clawed like a demented man at the other's hands for possession of the hypodermic.

Clancy surrendered the syringe with a mocking grin, and shoved Smarlinghue backward into his chair again.

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"Oh, yes; you're an artist all right—a coke artist!" he remarked coolly. "But that's what makes you solid in every den in New York, and that's how you come in useful—to me. Well, what do you say?"

There was a hunted look in Smarlinghue's eyes.

"They'd—they'd kill me," he said huskily.

"Sure, they would!" agreed Clancy easily. "If they found you out it would be good-night, all right—that's what you're getting paid for. But"—his voice hardened—"if you don't come across, I'll tell you what *I'll* do to you. I'll——"

"You can't do anything! Not a thing!" Smarlinghue cried wildly. "You haven't anything on me at all. I've never done a thing, not a single——"

"Oh, I guess there's enough to make you sweat," Clancy cut in brutally. "You give me the icy paw, and I'll see that the tip leaks out from the right quarters that you *are* a stool pigeon. That'll take care of your finish, too, won't it—good and plenty!"

Smarlinghue stared miserably. Again and again his tongue circled his lips. Twice he tried to speak—and only succeeded in mumbling inarticulately.

Clancy got up from the table, walked around it, and, standing over the crouched figure in the chair, tapped with his finger on the hypodermic in Smarlinghue's hands.

"And that ain't all," he announced with a malicious grin. "You come in and play the game with me, or I'll fix it so that you'll never get another squirt of dope if you had a million bucks to buy it with—ah, I thought that would get you!"

Smarlinghue was on his feet. The terror of the damned was in his face.

"No! No! My God—no—not that! You—you wouldn't do that!" He reached out his arms to the other.

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"You know—I've gone too far to do without it. If I didn't have it, I——"

"I've seen a few of them in that sort of jim-jams," said Clancy malevolently. "You can't tell me anything about it. If you appreciate it, that's enough—it's up to you. You heard what I said. If you're looking for that particular kind of hell, go to it. Only don't kid yourself. When I pass the word to put the screws on, the lid's down for keeps. Well, what's the answer? Coming across? Quick now! I haven't got all night to spend here!"

Smarlinghue's hands were trembling violently; he sat down in his chair in a pitiful, uncertain way.

"Yes, yes!" he whispered. *"Yes!* I got to do it. I'll do it, Mr. Clancy, I'll do it! I'll—I'll do anything!"

A half leer, half scowl was on Clancy's face, as he stood regarding the other.

"I thought you would!" he grunted roughly. "Well then, we'll get down to business—and *to-night's* business. You know the back entrance to Malay John's hang-out?"

Smarlinghue's eyes widened a little in a startled way. He nodded his head.

"Very good," said Clancy gruffly. *"You'll* have no trouble in getting in there. And once in there you'll have no trouble in getting up to Malay's private den. I've been wised up that Malay and a few of his pals are getting ready to pull off a little game uptown. I want the dope on it—*all* of it. They've been meeting in Malay's den for the last few nights—understand? They drift in between halfpast eleven and twelve—you get there a little *before* halfpast eleven. You haven't anything to be afraid of, so don't lose your nerve. Malay himself is away this evening and won't be back before midnight; and the door won't be locked, as otherwise the others couldn't get in. Everything's clear for you.

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Savvy? Once you're in the room, there's plenty of places to hide—and that's all you've got to do, except keep your ears and eyes open. Get the lay?"

Again Smarlinghue nodded—unhappily this time.

"All right!" said Clancy crisply. "I'm not coming around here any more—*unless I have to.* It might put you in bad. You can make your reports and get your orders through Whitie Karn at his dance hall."

"Whitie Karn!" The exclamation seemed to come involuntarily, in a quick, frightened way from Smarlinghue.

Clancy's lips twisted in a smile.

"Kind of a jolt—eh—Smarlinghue? You didn't suspect he was one of *us,* did you?—and there's more than Whitie Karn. Well, it will teach you to be careful. Suppose Whitie, for instance, passed the word that you were a snitch—eh? It won't do you any harm to keep that in mind once in a while." He moved over to the door. "Well, good-night, Smarlinghue! I guess you understand, don't you? You ought to be a pretty valuable man, and I expect a lot from you. If I don't get it——" He shrugged his shoulders, held Smarlinghue for an instant with half-closed, threatening eyes—and then the door closed behind him.

Smarlinghue did not move. The steps receded from the door, and died away along the passage. A minute, two minutes went by. Suddenly Smarlinghue pushed back the wristband of his shirt, and pricked the skin with the needle of the hypodermic. The door, without a sound, swung wide open. Clancy stood in the doorway.

"Good-night again, Smarlinghue," he said coolly.

The hypodermic fell clattering to the floor; Smarlinghue jumped nervously in his chair.

Clancy laughed—significantly; and, without closing the door this time, strode away again. His steps echoed

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back from the passageway, the front door opened and shut, his boot heel rang on the pavement without—and all was silence.

Smarlinghue rose from his chair, shuffled across the room, closed the door and locked it, then shuffled back again to the roller shade over the little French window, and, taking a pin from the lapel of his coat, fastened the rent together.

A passing cloud for a moment obscured the moonrays from the top-light; the gas-jet choked with air, spluttered, burning with a tiny, blue, hissing flame; then the white path lay across the floor again, and the yellow flare of gas spurted up into its pitiful fulness—and in Smarlinghue's stead stood another man. Gone were the stooping shoulders, gone the hollow cheeks, the thin, extended lips, the widened nostrils, as the little distorting pieces of wax were removed; and out of the metamorphosis, hard and grim, set like chiselled marble, was revealed the face of—Jimmie Dale.

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CHAPTER II

THE WARNING

FOR a moment Jimmie Dale stood there hesitant, the long, slim, tapering fingers curled into the palms of his hands, his fists clenched tightly, a dull red suffusing his cheeks and burning through the masterly created pallor of his make-up; and then slowly as though his mind were in dismay, he walked across the room, turned off the gas, and going to the cot flung himself down upon it.

What was he to do? What ghastly irony had prompted Clancy to sort *him* out for a police spy? If he refused, if he attempted to stall on Clancy, Clancy's threat to stamp him in the eyes of the underworld as a snitch meant ruin and disaster, absolute and final, for "Smarlinghue" would then have to disappear; on the other hand, to be allied with the police increased his present risks a thousandfold—and they were already hazardous enough! It meant constant surveillance by the police that would hamper him, rob him of his freedom of movement, adding difficulties and perils innumerable to the enacting of this new dual personality of his.

Jimmie Dale's hands clenched more fiercely. It was an impossible situation—it was untenable. That he could play his rôle in the underworld with only the underworld to reckon with—*yes;* but with the police as well, watching him in his character of a poor, drug-wrecked artist, constantly in touch with him, likely at any moment to make the discovery that Smarlinghue and Jimmie Dale,

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the millionaire clubman, a leader in New York's most exclusive set, were one and the same—*no!* And yet what was he to do? With the Gray Seal it had been different. Then, police and underworld alike were openly allied as common enemies against him—but none had known who the Gray Seal was until that night when the Magpie had roused the Bad Lands like a hive of swarming hornets with the news that the Gray Seal was Larry the Bat; none had known until that night when it was accepted as a fact that Larry the Bat, and therefore the Gray Seal, had perished miserably in the tenement fire.

Around the squalid room, lighted now only by the moonrays, Jimmie Dale's eyes travelled slowly, abstractedly. Yes, in that one particular it was different; but here was the New Sanctuary, and again he was living the old life in close, intimate companionship with the underworld—the old life that only six months ago he had thought to have done with forever!

He turned his face suddenly to the wall, and lay very still—only his hands still remained tightly clenched, and the hard, set look on his face grew harder still.

Six months ago, like some mocking illusion, like some phantom of unreality that jeered at him, it seemed now, he had lived for a few short weeks in a dreamland of wondrous happiness, a happiness that all his own great wealth had never been able to bring him, a happiness that no wealth could ever buy—the joy of her—the glad promise that for always their lives would be lived together—and then, as though she had vanished utterly from the face of the earth, she was gone.

The Tocsin! Marie LaSalle to the world, she was always, and always would be, the Tocsin to him. *Gone!* A hand unclenched and passed heavily across his eyes and flirted the hair back from his forehead. She had taken her place in her own world again; her fortune had

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been restored to her, its management placed in the hands of a trust company; the interior of the mansion on Fifth Avenue, with its sliding walls and secret passages, that had served as headquarters for the Crime Club, was in the process of reconstruction—and she had disappeared.

It had come suddenly, and yet—as he understood now, though then he had only attributed it to an exaggerated prudence on her part—not without warning. In the three weeks that had intervened between the night of the fire in the old Sanctuary and her disappearance, she had permitted him to see her only at such times and at such intervals as would be consistent with the most casual of acquaintanceships. He remembered well enough now her answer to his constant protests, an answer that was always the same. "Jimmie," she had said, "a sudden intimacy between us would undo all that you have done—you know that. It would not only renew, but would be almost proof positive to those who are left of the Crime Club that their suspicions of Jimmie Dale were justified, and from that as a starting point it would not take a very clever brain to identify Jimmie Dale as Larry the Bat—and the Gray Seal. Don't you see! You never knew me before all the misery and trouble came—there was nothing between us then. To see too much of each other now, to have too much in common now would only be to court disaster. Our intimacy must appear to come gradually, to come naturally. We must wait—a year at least—Jimmie."

A year! And within a few hours following the last occasion on which she had said that, Jason, his butler, had laid the morning mail upon the breakfast table, and he had found her note.

It seemed as though he were living that moment over again now, as he lay here on the cot in the darkness—his eagerness as he had recognised the well-known hand

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amongst the pile of correspondence, the thrill akin to tenderness with which he had opened the note; and then the utter misery of it all, the room swirling about him, the blind agony in which he had risen from his chair, and, as he had groped his way from the room, the sudden, pitiful anxiety on the faithful old Jason's face, which, even in his own distress, he had not failed to note and understand and be grateful for.

There had been only a few words in the note, and those few carefully chosen, guarded, like the notes of old, lest they should fall into a stranger's hand; but he had read only too clearly between the lines. She had had only far too much more reason for fear than she had admitted to him; and those fears had crystallised into realities. One sentence in the note stood out above all others, a sentence that had lived with him since that morning months ago, the words seeming to visualise her, high in her courage, brave in the unselfishness of her love: "Jimmie, I must not, I cannot, I will not bring you into the shadows again; I must fight this out alone."

He recalled the feverish haste in which he had acted that morning—the one thought that had possessed him being to reach her if possible before she could put her designs into execution. Benson, his chauffeur, reckless of speed laws, had rushed him to the hotel where, pending the remodelling of the Fifth Avenue mansion, she had taken rooms. Here, he learned that she had given up her apartments on the previous afternoon, and that it was understood she had left for an extended travel tour, and that her baggage had been taken to the Pennsylvania Station. From the hotel he had gone to the trust company in whose hands she had placed the management of her estate. With a few additional details, disquieting rather than otherwise, it was the story of the hotel over again. They did not know where she was, except that

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she had told them she was going away for a long trip, had given them the fullest powers to handle her affairs, and, on the previous afternoon, had drawn a very large sum of money before leaving the institution.

He had returned then, like a man dazed, to his home on Riverside Drive, and had locked himself in his den to think it out. She had covered her tracks well—and had done it in a masterly way because she had done it simply. It was possible that she had actually gone away for a trip; but it was more probable that she had not. He had had, of course, no means of knowing; but the sort of peril that threatened her, his intuition told him, was not such as to be diverted by the mere expedient of absenting herself from New York temporarily; and, besides, she had said that she would *fight* it out. She could hardly do that in the *person* of Marie LaSalle, or away from New York. She was clever, resourceful, resolute and fearless—and those very traits opened a vista of possibilities that left his mind staggering blindly as in a maze. She was gone—and alone in the face of deadly menace. He remembered then the curious, unnatural calmness underlying the mad whirling of his brain at the thought that that was not literally true, that she was not, nor would she ever be alone—while he lived. It was only a question of *how* he could help her. It had seemed almost certain that the danger threatening her came from one of two sources—either from those who were left of the Crime Club, relentless, savage for vengeance on account of the ruin and disaster that had overtaken them; or else from the Magpie, and behind the Magpie, massed like some Satanic phalanx, every denizen of the underworld, for Silver Mag had disappeared coincidently with Larry the Bat, coincidently with the Magpie's attempted robbery of the supposed Henry LaSalle's safe, to which plot she was held by the under-

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world to be a party, coincidently with the dispersion of the Crime Club, *and coincidently with the reappearance of the heiress Marie LaSalle*—and, further, Silver Mag stood condemned to death in the Bad Lands as the accomplice of the Gray Seal. But Silver Mag had disappeared. Had the underworld, prompted by the Magpie, solved the riddle—did it know, or guess, or suspect that Silver Mag was Marie LaSalle?

Which was it? The Crime Club, or the Magpie? Here again he could not know, though he inclined to the belief that it was the latter; but here, in either case, the means of knowing, of helping her, the way, the road, was clearly defined—and the road was the road to the underworld. But Larry the Bat was dead and the road was barred. And then a half finished painting standing on an easel at the rear of his den had brought him inspiration. It was one of his hobbies—and it swung wide again for him the door of the underworld. None, in a broken-down, disappointed, drug-shattered artist, would recognise Larry the Bat! The only similarity between the two—the one thing that must of necessity be the same in order to explain plausibly his intimacy with the dens and lairs of Crimeland, the one thing that would, if nothing more, assure an unsuspicious, tolerant acceptance of his presence there, was that, like Larry the Bat, he would assume the rôle of a confirmed dope fiend; but as there were many dope fiends, thousands of them in the Bad Lands, that point of similarity, even if Larry the Bat were not believed to be dead, held little, if any, risk. For the rest, it was easy enough; and so there had come into being these wretched quarters here, the New Sanctuary —and Smarlinghue.

But the mere assumption of a new rôle was not all—it was not there that the difficulty lay; it was in gaining for Smarlinghue the *confidence* of the underworld that

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Larry the Bat had once held. And that had taken time—was not even yet an accomplished fact. The intimate, personal acquaintance of Larry the Bat with every crook and dive in Gangland had aided him, as Smarlinghue, to gain an initial foothold, but his complete establishment there had necessarily had to be of Smarlinghue's own making. And it had taken time. Six months had gone now, six months that, as far as the Tocsin was concerned, had been barren of results mainly, he encouraged himself to believe, because his efforts had been always limited and held in check; six months of anxious, careful building, and now, just as he was regaining the old-time confidence that Larry the Bat had enjoyed, just as he was reaching that point where the whispered secrets of the underworld once more reached his ears and there was a promise of success if, indeed, she were still alive, had come this thing to-night that spelt ruin to his hopes and ultimate disaster to himself.

If she were still alive! The thought came flashing back; and with a low, involuntary moan, mingling anguish of mind with a bitter, merciless fury, he turned restlessly upon the cot. If she were still alive! No sign, no word had come from her; he had found no clue, no trace of her as yet through the channels of the underworld; his surveillance of the Magpie, whose friendship he had begun to cultivate, had, so far, proved fruitless.

It came upon him now again, the fear, the dread, which he had known so often in the past few months, that seemed to try to undermine his resolution to go forward, that whispered speciously that it was useless—that she was dead. And misery came. And he lay there staring unseeingly into the moonrays as they streamed in through the top-light.

Time passed. Then a smile played over Jimmie Dale's lips, half grim, half wistful; and the strong, square jaw

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was suddenly out-flung. If she was alive, he would find her; if she was dead—his clenched hand lifted above his head as though to register a vow—the man or men, her murderer or murderers, whether to-morrow or in the years to come, would know a day of reckoning when they should pay the debt!

But that was for the future. To-night there was this vital, imminent danger that he had to face, this decision to make whose pros and cons seemed each to hold an equal measure of dismay. What was he to do?

He laughed shortly, ironically after a moment. It was as though some malignant ingenuity had conspired to trap him. He was caught either way. What was he to do? The question kept pounding at his brain, growing more sinister with each repetition. What was he to do? Defy the police—and be branded as a stool-pigeon, a snitch, an informer in every nook and cranny of the underworld! He could not do that. Everything, all that meant anything in life to him now would be swept from his reach at even the first breath of suspicion. Nor was it an idle threat that his unwelcome visitor had made. He was not fool enough to blind himself on that score—it could be only too easily accomplished. And on the other hand—but what was the use of torturing his brain with a never-ending rehearsal of details? Was there a middle course? That was his only chance. Was there a way to safeguard Smarlinghue and, yes, this miserable hovel of a place, priceless now as his new Sanctuary.

He followed the moonpath's slant with his eyes to where it touched the floor and disclosed the greasy, threadbare, pitiful carpet. A grim whimsicality fell upon him. It would be too bad to lose it! It was luxury to what Larry the Bat had known! There had not even been a carpet in the old Sanctuary, and—he sat sud-

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denly bolt upright on the cot, his eyes, that had mechanically travelled on along the moonpath, strained now upon where the light fell upon the threshold of the door. There was a little white patch there, a most curious little white patch—that had not been there when he had thrown himself on the cot. Came a sudden, incredulous thought that sent the blood whipping fiercely through his veins; and with a low cry, in mad, feverish haste now, he leaped from the cot and across the room.

It was an envelope that had been thrust in under the door. In an instant he had snatched it up from the floor, and in another, acting instinctively, even while he realised the futility of what he did, he wrenched the door open, stared out into a dark and empty passageway—and, with a strange, almost hysterical laugh, closed and locked the door again.

There was no writing on the envelope; there was not light enough to have deciphered it if there had been—but he had need for neither writing nor light. Those long, slim, tapering fingers, those wonderful fingers of Jimmie Dale, that seemed to combine all human faculties in their sensitive tips, had already telegraphed their message to his brain—it was the same texture of paper that she always used—it was from *her*—it was from the Tocsin.

Joy, gladness, a relief so terrific as it surged upon him as to leave him for the moment physically weak, held him in thrall, and he stumbled back across the room, and slipped down into a chair before the table, and dropped his head forward into his arms, the note tightly clasped in his hand. She was *alive*. The Tocsin was alive—and well—and here in New York—and free—and they had not caught her. It meant all those things, the coming and the manner of the coming of this note. A deep thankfulness filled his heart; it seemed that it was only

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now he realised the full measure of the fear and anxiety, the strain under which he had been labouring for so many months. She was alive—the Tocsin was alive. It was like some wonderful song that filled his soul, excluding all else. How little the contents of the note itself mattered—the one great, glorious fact for the moment was that she was alive!

It was a long time before Jimmie Dale raised his head, and then he got up suddenly from his chair, and lit the gas. But even then he hesitated as he turned the note over, speculatively now, in his fingers. So she knew him as Smarlinghue! In some way she had found that out! His brows gathered abstractedly, then cleared again. Well, at any rate, it was added proof that so far her cleverness had completely outwitted those who had pitted themselves against her—so much so that even her freedom of action, in whatever rôle she had assumed, was still left open to her.

He tore the envelope open. There was no preface to the note, no "Dear Philanthropic Crook" as there had always been in the old days—instead, the single, closely-written sheet began abruptly, the writing itself indicating that it had been composed in desperate haste. He glanced quickly over the first few lines.

"You should not have done this. You should never have come into the underworld again. I begged, I implored you not to do so. And now you are in danger to-night. I can only hope and pray that this will reach you in time, and——" He read on, in a startled way now, to the end; then read the note over again more slowly, this time muttering snatches of it aloud: ". . . Chicago . . . Slimmy Jack and Malay . . . Birdie Lee . . . released from Sing Sing to-day . . . triangular scar on forehead over right eye. . . ."

And then, for a little while, Jimmie Dale stood there

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staring about the room, motionless, rigid as stone, save that his fingers moved in an automatic, mechanical way as they began to tear the note into little shreds. But presently into his face there crept a menacing look, and an angry red began to tinge his cheeks, and his jaws clamped ominously.

So that was the game at Malay John's, was it? Birdie Lee was out again! She had not needed to mention any scar to enable him to identify Birdie Lee. He knew the man of old. The slickest of them all, the cleverest of them all, before he had been caught and sent to Sing Sing for a five-years' term, was Birdie Lee—the one man of them all that he, Jimmie Dale, might regard as a rival, so to speak, where the mastery of the intricate mechanism of a vaunted and much advertised "guaranteed burglar-proof safe" was concerned! And Birdie Lee was out again!

There was danger if he went to Malay John's, she had said—and it was true. But what if he did *not* go! What, for instance, if Birdie Lee went through with this night's work!

Jimmie Dale walked slowly across the room, halted before the wall near the door, stood for an instant hesitant there—and then, as though in a sudden, final decision, dropped down on his knees, and, working swiftly, removed the section of the base-board from the wall for the second time that night.

Out came the neatly folded clothes of Jimmie Dale; and with them, serving him so well in the days gone by, the leather girdle, or undervest, with its stout-sewn, upright pockets in which nestled, in an array of fine, blue-steel, highly tempered instruments, a compact powerful burglar's kit. It was the one thing that he had saved from the fire in the old Sanctuary—and that more by accident than design. He had been wearing the

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girdle that night when he had stolen into the Crime Club, and afterwards had returned to the Sanctuary with the intention of destroying forever all traces of Larry the Bat; and then, only half dressed, as he was changing into the clothes of Jimmie Dale, the alarm had come before he had taken off the girdle, and, without thought of it again at the time, he had still been wearing it when he had made his escape. He looked at it now for a moment grimly—and smiled in a mirthless way. He had not used it since that night, and that night he had never meant or thought to use it again—only to destroy it!

He reached into the aperture in the wall once more, drew out a pocket flashlight and an automatic pistol, and laid them down beside the clothes and the leather girdle; then, pulling off his coat and shirt, he ran noiselessly across the room to the washstand. A few drops from a tiny phial poured into the water, and the pallor, the sickly hue from his face was gone. It was to be Jimmie Dale—not Smarlinghue—who would keep the rendezvous at Malay John's!

And now he was back across the room once more, turning out the light as he passed the gas-jet. The leather girdle, that went on much after the fashion of a life-preserver, was fastened over his shoulders and secured around his waist. The remainder of his clothes were stripped off with lightning speed, and in their place were donned the fashionably tailored, immaculate tweeds of Jimmie Dale. It was like some quick-moving, shadowy pantomime in the moonlight. He gathered up the discarded garments, tucked them into the opening in the wall, replaced the baseboard, slipped the automatic and flashlight into the side pockets of his coat—and stood up, his fingers feeling swiftly over his vest and under the back of his coat to guard against the pos-

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sibility of any tell-tale bulge from the leather girdle underneath.

An instant he stood glancing critically about him; then the roller shade over the window was lifted aside, the window itself, on carefully oiled hinges, was opened noiselessly, closed again—and, hugged close against the wall of the building, hidden in the black shadows, Jimmie Dale, so silent as to be almost uncanny in his movements, crept along the few intervening feet to the fence that enclosed the courtyard. Here, next to the wall, a loosened plank swung outward at a touch, and he was standing in a narrow, black areaway beyond. There was only the depth of the house between himself and the street, and he paused now, crouched motionless against the wall, listening. He heard no footfalls from the pavement—only, like a distant murmur, the night sounds from the Bowery, a block away—only the muffled roar of an elevated train. The way was presumably clear, and he moved forward again—cautiously. He reached the front of the building, which, like the old Sanctuary, was a tenement of the poorer class, paused once more, this time to peer quickly up and down the dark, ill-lighted cross street—and, satisfied that he was safe from observation, stepped out on the sidewalk, and began to walk nonchalantly along to the Bowery.

And here, at the corner, under a street lamp he consulted his watch. It was ten o'clock! He smiled a little ironically. Certainly, they would hardly expect him as early as that! Well, he would be a little ahead of time, that was all!

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CHAPTER III

THE MAN WITH THE SCAR

JIMMIE DALE walked on again, rapidly now, heading down the Bowery. At the expiration of perhaps ten minutes, he turned east; and still a few minutes later, in the neighbourhood of Chatham Square, plunged suddenly into a dark alleyway—there was, of course, as there was to all such places, an unobtrusive entrance to Malay John's.

His lips tightened a little as he moved quietly forward. To venture here in an unknown character was not far from being tantamount, if he were discovered, to taking his life in his hands. Malay John was a queer customer and a bad enemy, though counted "straight" by the underworld, and trusted by the crooks and near-crooks as few other men were in the Bad Lands. And, if Malay John was queer, the place he ran was queerer still. Ostensibly he conducted a dance hall, and a profitable one at that; but below the dance hall, known only to the initiated, deep down in a sub-cellar, was perhaps the most remunerative gambling joint and pipe lay-out in Crimeland.

Jimmie Dale halted before a doorway in the alley. The rear of a low building rose black and unlighted above him. A confused jangle from a tinny piano, accompanying a blatant cornet and a squeaky violin, mingled with the dull scrape of many feet, laughter, voices, singing—the dance hall at the front of the building was in full

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swing. He glanced sharply up and down the dark alleyway, then, leaning forward, placed his ear to the panel of the door—and the next instant opened the door softly and stepped inside.

It was pitch black here, but it was familiar ground to Larry the Bat in the old days, and therefore to Smarling-hue in the new. The short passageway in which he was standing terminated, he knew, in a rear entrance to the dance hall, which was always kept locked and used only by Malay John himself, and which was just at the foot of the stairs that led upward to Malay John's combination of private den, office, and sleeping apartment; while at the side of the passage, half way along, was that other door, always guarded on the inside, that required an "open sesame" to gain admittance to the dive below.

And now he crept stealthily past this latter door, reached the staircase, and went swiftly up to the landing above. Here another door barred his way, and here again he placed his ear to the panel—but this time to listen, it seemed, interminably. Every faculty was strained and alert now. He could take no chances here, and the uproar from the dance hall below, while it had safeguarded his ascent of the stairs, was confusing now and by no means an unmixed blessing.

Still he crouched there, his ear to the panel—and then, satisfied at last, he tried the door. It was locked.

"The penalty of being early!" murmured Jimmie Dale softly to himself.

His hand reached in under his vest to one of the pockets in the leather girdle, and a tiny steel instrument was inserted in the lock. There was a curious snipping sound, the doorknob turned slowly under his hand; then cautiously, inch by inch, he pushed the door open, slipped through—and stood motionless on the other side of the threshold. Save only from the dance hall below,

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there was not a sound. The door closed again; again that snipping sound as it was relocked—and then the round, white ray of Jimmie Dale's flashlight circled his surroundings.

There was a sort of barbaric splendour to the place. Malay John was something of a sybarite! It was a single room, whose floor was covered with rich Turkish rugs, whose walls were covered with Oriental hangings, and in one corner was a great, wide divan, canopied, also with Oriental hangings at head and foot, serving presumably for a bed; but, striking a somewhat incongruous note, others of the appointments were modern enough—the flat-topped desk in the centre of the room with its revolving chair, for instance, and a large, ponderous safe that stood back against the rear wall.

Jimmie Dale crossed the room for a closer inspection of the safe, and, as his flashlight played over the single dial, he shook his head whimsically. No, it would be hardly true to call *that* modern; it was only an ancient monstrosity, a helpless thing at the mercy of any cracksman who——

The flashlight in his hand went out. Like lightning, Jimmie Dale, his tread silent on the heavy rugs, leaped back across the room, and in an instant slipped in behind the end hangings of the divan and stood, pressed closely, against the wall.

A key turned stealthily in the lock, the door opened as stealthily—then silence—then a flashlight swept suddenly around the room—darkness again—and then a hoarse whisper:

"All clear, Birdie. Lock the door."

The door closed. The flashlight played down the room again—and upon Jimmie Dale's lips came a twisted smile, as, his fingers edging the hanging slightly to one side, he peered out.

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The light ray moving before them, two dark forms stole across the room to the safe.

"There you are, Birdie!" said one of them. "Ain't she a beaut! Say, a kid could open it! Didn't I tell you I was handing you one on a gold platter!"

The light ray now flooded the front of the safe, and outlined the forms of the two men. One of them, holding the flashlight, dropped on his knees, and began to twirl the dial tentatively; the other leaned negligently against the corner of the safe.

"I ain't so sure it's easy, Slimmy," replied the man on his knees, after a moment. He stopped twirling the dial, and looked up. "Mabbe it'll take longer than we figured on. Are you sure there ain't no chance of Malay gettin' back? I'd rather stack up against every bull in New York than him."

The twisted smile on Jimmie Dale's lips still lingered. So that was Slimmy Jack there, leaning against the safe! Slimmy Jack—and Birdie Lee! His fingers drew the hangings a little further apart. The room was in complete darkness except for the circle of light around the safe, and it was as though what was being enacted before him were some strange, realistic film thrown upon a screen—just two forms in the white light, their faces masked, against the background of the safe, with its glittering nickel dial. And now Slimmy Jack, from his negligent pose, straightened sharply and leaned toward Birdie Lee.

"Say, what's the matter with you, Birdie!" he exclaimed roughly. "You didn't let 'em get your nerve up the river, did you? You've been acting kind of queer all day. I told you before, Malay wouldn't be back in time to monkey with *us*. We don't have to stand for this—I told you that, too. You don't think I'm a fool, do you, to steer you into a lay that's got a come-back on

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myself unless the thing was planted right? Why, damn it, Malay knows I saw the coin put in there. D'ye think I'd give him a chance of suspecting *me!* It's all fixed—you know that. Now, go to it—there's a nice little piece of money in there that'll keep us going till we pull that Chicago deal."

"All right!" Birdie Lee answered tersely. "Keep quiet, then, and I'll see what I can do."

He laid his ear against the safe, listening for the tumblers' fall, as, holding the flashlight in his left hand, its rays upon the dial, the fingers of his right began to work swiftly again with the glistening knob.

From below, the confused, dull medley of sound from the dance hall seemed only to intensify the silence in the room. Slimmy Jack stood motionless at the side of the safe, his elbow resting against the old-fashioned, protruding upper hinge. A minute, two, another, and still another dragged by. Came then a short ejaculation from Birdie Lee.

Slimmy Jack bent forward instantly.

"Got it?" he demanded eagerly.

"No—curse it!" gritted Birdie Lee. "My fingers seem to have lost their touch—I ain't had much practice for the last five years up there in Sing Sing!"

"Well, then, 'soup' it!" grunted Slimmy Jack. "You could blow the roof off, and no one would be the wiser with that racket downstairs. We can't waste all night over it."

"What are you going to 'soup' it with?" Birdie Lee flung back gruffly. "We didn't bring nothing. You said——"

"I know I did!" A sullen menace had crept suddenly into Slimmy Jack's voice. "I said you could open an old tin can like that with your hands tied—and so you can. Try it again!"

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Jimmie Dale's fingers stole inside his shirt, and into a pocket of the leather girdle, and brought forth a black silk mask. He slipped it quickly over his face. Birdie Lee was at work once more. It was about time to play his own hand in the game. The Tocsin had made no mistake, he was sure of that now, and——

Birdie Lee spoke again.

"It's no use, Slimmy!" he muttered. "I guess I ain't any good any more. I can't open the damned thing!"

"Try it again!" ordered Slimmy Jack shortly.

"But it's no use, I tell you!" retorted Birdie Lee. "I ain't got the feel in my fingers."

"You—try—it—again!" There was a cold, ominous ring in Slimmy Jack's voice.

Birdie Lee drew back a little on his knees, glancing quickly up at the other.

"What—what d'ye mean by that, Slimmy!" he exclaimed in a startled way.

"I'll show you what I mean, and I'll show you blamed quick if you don't open that safe!" Slimmy Jack threatened hoarsely. "Blast you, you're stalling on me—that's what you're doing! I've seen you work before. You could open that thing with your finger nails, if you wanted to! Now, open it!"

"But, I can't!" protested Birdie Lee. "I wouldn't hand you anything like that, Slimmy—you know that, Slimmy. I——"

"*Open it!* And open it—*quick!*" Slimmy Jack's hand was wrenching at his side pocket.

"But, I tell you, I can't, Slimmy!" cried Birdie Lee, almost piteously. "It's queered me up there in the pen. I"—he was rising to his feet—"Slimmy—for God's sake—what are you doing—you——"

There was a flash, the roar of the report, a swaying form, a revolver clattering to the floor—and with a

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crash Slimmy Jack pitched forward and lay motionless.

Then silence.

It had come without warning, in the winking of an eye, and for a moment it seemed to Jimmie Dale that he could not grasp the full significance of what had happened—that Slimmy Jack, his sleeve catching on the hinge of the safe as he had finally succeeded in jerking his revolver from his pocket, had, a grim, ironical trick of fate, accidentally shot hmself! Mechanically, automatically, Jimmie Dale's hands went to his pockets and produced his own flashlight and revolver—but he did not move. His eyes now were on Birdie Lee, who, like a man dazed and terror-stricken, had lurched back against the safe, the flashlight that dangled in his hand sweeping queer, aimless patches of light about the floor.

Still silence—only the uproar from the dance hall that would have drowned out to those below the sound of the revolver shot. Then Birdie Lee staggered forward, and knelt beside the prostrate form on the floor. He stood up again presently, swaying unsteadily on his feet, turning his head wildly about, now this way, now that. And then his whisper, broken, hoarse, quavered through the room:

"He's dead. My God—he's—he's dead."

"Drop that flashlight!" Jimmie Dale's voice rang cold, imperative. *"Drop it!"* And, sweeping the hangings aside, the ray of his own light suddenly full upon Birdie Lee. he leaped forward.

With a low, terrified cry, the other let the flashlight fall as though from nerveless fingers, and shrank back against the safe.

"Now put your hands above your head!" directed Jimmie Dale curtly.

The man obeyed.

Dark, frightened eyes stared out at Jimmie Dale from

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behind the mask that covered Birdie Lee's face. Swiftly, deftly, Jimmie Dale felt over the other's clothing for a weapon. There was none. Then, himself in darkness, the blinding light in Birdie Lee's face, he pulled off the other's mask, and with a grim, quick touch of his revolver muzzle traced out the white, pulsing, triangular scar on the man's forehead.

"So you're up to your old tricks again, are you, Birdie?" he inquired coldly. "Five years up the river wasn't enough for you—eh?"

The man drew himself up suddenly, and, squaring his shoulders, made as though to speak—and then, with a swift, hopeless gesture, turned his back, and, leaning over the top of the safe, buried his head in his arms.

A strange smile touched Jimmie Dale's lips. He stooped down, picked up the revolver from the floor, slipped it into his pocket, bent over Slimmy Jack for an instant to assure himself that the man was dead—then stepping back to the safe, he laid his hand on the ex-convict's shoulder.

"Birdie," he said quietly, "could you open this safe if you wanted to?"

The man swung sharply around, the prison pallor of his face a pitiful, deathlike colour in the flashlight's rays.

"Who are you?" he asked thickly.

"A friend perhaps—if you can open that safe," Jimmie Dale answered.

A puzzled look crept into Birdie's eyes.

"W-what do you mean?" he stammered.

"I mean that I want the *proof* that you are straight," Jimmie Dale said softly. "I've been here in the room all the time. I want to know whether you were stalling on Slimmy Jack, or not. And I want to know, if you *were* stalling, how you came to be here with him."

"That's a queer spiel," said Birdie Lee, in a troubled

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way. "I thought at first you were a bull—but you don't talk like one. Mabbe you're playin' with me; but, whether you are or not, I guess it won't make much difference what I say. You couldn't help me if you wanted to now—with him dead there"—he jerked his head toward the form on the floor.

"Tell me, anyhow," insisted Jimmie Dale quietly.

Birdie's hand lifted and swept across his eyes.

"Well, all right," he said, after a moment; "I'll tell you. Me and Slimmy used to work together all the time in Chicago and out West after I left New York, and until I came back here one day and pulled one alone and got sent up for it. Well, to-day, when they let me out of Sing Sing, Slimmy had come on from Chicago and was waitin' for me. He had a deal all fixed in Chicago that we was to pull together, a big one, and this little one here was to keep us goin' until the big one came off. He was with Malay John in this room to-day when a gambler from up the State somewhere blew in with a roll of about three thousand dollars, and handed it over to Malay to keep while he knocked around town for a day or two. Malay put the money in this safe here, and that's what Slimmy was after for a starter. I told Slimmy I was all through—that I was goin' straight. He wouldn't believe me. I guess you don't. I guess nobody will. I got a record that's mabbe too black to live down, and—oh, well, what's the use! I meant to live decent, but I guess any chance I had is gone now." His voice choked. "That's the way I had doped it out up there in the pen—that I was goin' straight. That's all, isn't it? I told Slimmy I was through—but Slimmy held something over me that was good for twenty years. What could I do? I said I'd come in on this, figurin' that I could queer the game by stallin'. I—I tried it. If

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you were here, you saw me. I pretended that I couldn't open the safe, and——"

"*Can* you?" inquired Jimmie Dale gently.

"That thing!" Birdie Lee smiled mirthlessly. "Why it's only a double combin——"

"Open it, then," prompted Jimmie Dale.

Birdie Lee stooped impulsively to the dial of the safe; hesitated, then straightened up again, and shook his head.

"No," he said. "I guess I'll take my medicine. I don't know who you are. I might just as well have opened it for Slimmy as for you. It looks as though you were after the same thing he was."

Jimmie Dale smiled.

"Stand a little away from the safe, Birdie—there," he instructed. And, as the other obeyed wonderingly, Jimmie Dale knelt to the dial. "You see, I trust you not to move," he said. The dial was whirling under the sensitive fingers, and, like Birdie before him, his ear was pressed against the face of the safe.

The moments went by. Birdie Lee was watching in an eager, fascinated, startled way. Came at last a sharp, metallic click, as Jimmie Dale flung the handle over—and the door swung wide. He shut it again instantly—and locked it.

"It's your turn, Birdie," he said calmly. "You see that, as far as I or my intentions are concerned, it doesn't matter whether you open it or not."

"Who are you?" There was awed admiration in Birdie's voice. "You're slicker than ever I was, even in the old days. For God's sake, who are you?"

"Never mind," said Jimmie Dale. "Open the safe, if you can."

"I can open it all right," said Birdie, moving slowly forward; "and quicker than you did, because I got the

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combination when I was workin' on it with Slimmy watchin'. Throw the light on the knob, will you?"

It was barely an instant before Birdie Lee swung back the door.

"Now lock it again," directed Jimmie Dale. And then, as the other obeyed, he held out his hand to Birdie Lee. "You're clear, Birdie."

A tremor came to the other's face.

"Clear?" repeated Birdie unsteadily.

"Yes—you get your chance. That's one reason why I came here to-night—to spoil Slimmy Jack's play, to see that you got your chance if you really wanted it, as"—he added whimsically—"I was informed you did. Go ahead, Birdie—make your get-away—you're free."

But Birdie Lee shook his head.

"No," he said, and his voice caught again. "It's no good." He pointed to the still form on the floor. "I guess I go up for more than safe-crackin' this time. I—I guess it'll be the *chair*. When they find him here—dead—shot—they'll call it murder—and they'll put it onto me. The police know we have been together for years. They know he came here to-day when I got out. We've been seen together to-day. We—we were seen *quarrelling* this afternoon in a saloon over on the Bowery. That was when I was refusin' to start the old play again. They'd have what looked like an open and shut game against me. I wouldn't have a hope."

It was a moment before Jimmie Dale answered. What the man said was true—he would not have a hope—for an honest life—after five years in the penitentiary. He lifted his flashlight again and played it over Birdie Lee. They showed, those years, in the pallor, the drawn lines, the wan misery in the other's face.

And then Jimmie Dale's lips set firmly under his mask. There was a way to save the man. It was something

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he had never intended to do again—but it was worth the price—to save this man. It would be like a bombshell exploded in the underworld; it would arouse the police to infuriated activity; it would stir New York to its depths—but, after all, it could not touch Smarlinghue. It would only instil the belief that somehow Larry the Bat had escaped from the tenement fire; it would only mean a hunt for Larry the Bat day and night—but Larry the Bat no longer existed—and it would save this man.

He clamped the flashlight between his knees, leaving his hands free, and from the leather girdle drew the old-time metal case, thin, like a cigarette case, and from the case, with a pair of little tweezers that precluded the possibility of telltale finger prints, lifted out a small, diamond-shaped, gray-coloured paper seal, adhesive on one side, which he moistened now with his tongue—and, stooping quickly, attached it to the dead man's sleeve.

There was a sharp, startled cry from Birdie Lee.

"*The Gray Seal!* You're—you're Larry the Bat! They passed the word around in Sing Sing that you were dead, and——"

"And it will be the Gray Seal who is wanted for this—not you," said Jimmie Dale quietly. Then, almost sharply: "Now make your get-away, Birdie. Hurry! You and I part here. And the greater distance you put between yourself and this place to-night the better."

But the man seemed as though robbed of the power of movement—and then his lips quivered, and his eyes filled.

"But you," he faltered, "you—you're doing this for me, and I—I——"

Jimmie Dale caught the other's arm in a kindly grip.

"Good-night, Birdie," he said significantly. "I'm the last man now that you could afford to be seen with. You understand that. And I guess you can understand

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that I've reasons for not wanting to be seen myself. You've got your chance; give me mine to get away—alone." He pushed the man abruptly toward the door.

Still Birdie Lee hesitated; then catching Jimmie Dale's hand, he wrung it hard—and, with a half choked sob, turned and made his way from the room.

For an instant Jimmie Dale stood looking after the other through the darkness, listening as the stealthy steps descended the stairs—then suddenly he knelt again beside the dead man on the floor.

"You were clever, Slimmy!" he murmured. "Smarl-inghue wouldn't have had a chance of getting out from under this break—if your plans had worked out! And I didn't know you, of course, because you were a Chicago crook."

He took off the dead man's mask, and played his flashlight for a moment over the cold, set features.

A queer smile twisted Jimmie Dale's lips.

It was "Clancy of Headquarters"!

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CHAPTER IV

THE "murder" of Slimmy Jack had evidently been discovered too late for the make-up of the early morning papers; but from the noon editions onward it had been flung across the front pages in glaring type—even the most stately journals, for the nonce aroused out of their dignified calm, indulging in "display" headlines that, quite apart from the mere text, could not but have startled their equally stately and dignified readers. The Gray Seal, the leech that fed upon society, the murderer, the thief, the menace to the lives and property of law-abiding citizens, the scourge that for years New York had combated in the no more effective fashion than that of gnashing its teeth in impotent fury, had suddenly reappeared with a fresh murder to his credit. And New York had thought him dead!

Jimmie Dale, leaning back on the seat of his limousine as the car, now halting at a corner, now racing with a hundred others to snatch a block or two of distance before the next monarchial traffic officer of Fifth Avenue should hold it up again a victim to the evening rush, turned from first one to another of the pile of papers beside him. His strong, clean-shaven face was grave; and there was a sober light in the dark, steady eyes. In the St. James Club, which he had just left, perhaps the most sedate, certainly the most exclusive club in New York, it had been the one topic of conversation. Elderly gentle-

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men, not usually given to excitability, had joined with the younger members in a hectic denunciation of the police as criminally inefficient, and had made dire and absurdly vain threats as to what they, electing themselves for the moment a supreme court of last resort, proposed to do under the circumstances. The irony was exquisite, if they had but known! Also there was the element of humour, only there was a grim tinge to the humour that robbed it of its mirth—some day they *might* know!

He glanced out of the window, as the car was held up again. Everybody in the crowd, that waited on the corners for the stream of traffic to pass, seemed to have their eyes glued to their newspapers—even Benson, his chauffeur, during the moment of inaction, was surreptitiously reading a paper which he had flattened out on the seat beside him!

Jimmie Dale's eyes reverted to the newspaper in his hand, one of the most conservative. There was no mistaking the tenor of the leading article on the editorial page:

"It is not so much that a thug and criminal known as Slimmy Jack should have been murdered by another wretch of his own breed; indeed, that such should prey upon one another is far from being a matter of regret, for we might hope in time for the extermination of them all by the simple process of mutual attrition and at correspondingly little expense to ourselves—but that this so-called Gray Seal should still prove to be alive and at large is a matter that concerns every citizen personally. He does not confine his attentions to the Slimmy Jacks. The criminal records of the past few years reek with his acts, that run the gamut of every crime in the decalogue, crimes for the most part actuated apparently by no other motive than a monstrously in-

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nate thirst for notoriety—and the victims, for the most part, too, have been the innocent and the defenceless. What is the end of this to be? If the police cannot cope with this blood-mad ruffian, is New York to sit idly by and submit to another reign of terror instituted and carried on under the nose of authority by this inhuman jackal? If so, we are committing a crime against ourselves, we are insulting our intelligence, and——"

The man who had written that was a personal friend! Jimmie Dale threw the paper down, and picked up another, and after that another. They were pretty well all alike. They rehearsed the discovery of Larry the Bat as the Gray Seal; they rehearsed the story of the fire in the tenement of six months ago in which it was supposed that Larry the Bat had perished—they differed only in the virulence, a mere choice of words, with which they now demanded that this Larry the Bat, alias the Gray Seal, should be dug out like a rat from his hole, and the city be freed once and for all, and with no loophole for misadventure this time, of this "ogre of hell," as one paper put it, that was gorging itself upon New York.

The furrows gathered on Jimmie Dale's forehead, as he folded up the papers, and stared at his chauffeur's back through the plate-glass front of the car. He had known that the reappearance of the Gray Seal would arouse the community to a wild pitch of excitement, but he had far underestimated the effect. He could gauge it better now, though—he had only to look out of the windows at the passers-by. And this was only the respectable element of the city whose head and front was the police, and dangerous enough for all the bitter taunts, gibes and recriminations with which the police was maligned! There was still the far more dangerous element of the underworld! He had not been in that quar-

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ter since he had left Malay John's the night before, but he could picture it now well enough. God help him if he ever fell into those hands! In dens and dives, in the dark corners of that sordid world, they would be whispering blasphemous vows of vengeance against him one to another—and, relative to the hate and fear that welded them into a single unit, the police sank into insignificance. More than one of their élite had gone to the electric chair through the instrumentality of the Gray Seal; more than one was serving at that moment a long term behind penitentiary walls. Whose turn was it to be next? They needed no editorial prod in the underworld to run Larry the Bat to earth—there was the deeper spur of self-preservation! They knew who the Gray Seal was now, and the first blow that he had aimed upon his reappearance had apparently been at one of themselves. Their search for Larry the Bat would not be an indifferent one!

It was true that Larry the Bat no longer existed, that in that respect he was encompassed by a certain security he had not enjoyed before, but how long would that last? One slip, one moment off his guard, would wreck all that in the twinkling of an eye. Between the police and the underworld New York would be scoured from end to end for Larry the Bat; and, failing to find trace or sign of their quarry, how long would it be before they would put more faith in the evidence of the tenement fire than in the evidence of the Magpie, upon whose testimony alone Larry the Bat had been accepted as the Gray Seal, and believe again that Larry the Bat was dead, and that therefore they had not yet solved the identity of the Gray Seal!

He had never intended that the Gray Seal should ever have been heard of again. He shrugged his shoulders philosophically. One's intentions in this world did not always count for much! His hand had been forced, and

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he had paid the price to save Birdie Lee. He could not regret that! Whatever the consequences, the price had not been too high, and yet—his eyes roved again over the crowded thoroughfare. A car edged by his own. Two men were in the tonneau. One held a newspaper which he thumped with a menacing fist as he talked. The door windows of Jimmie Dale's limousine were down, and he caught two bitter, angry words:

"*. . . Gray Seal——*"

The sober expression on Jimmie Dale's face deepened. Only a fool would attempt to minimise or underestimate the meaning of what he saw around him. A hint, for instance, that he, Jimmie Dale, millionaire clubman, riding here in his limousine, was the Gray Seal, and this great, teeming, though orderly, Fifth Avenue would be transformed like magic into a seething, screaming whirl of madmen, and—he did not care to follow that trend of thought. He was quite well aware what would happen!

The car, close up against the curb, stopped once more in a traffic blockade. Smarlinghue was the most vital factor to be considered now, for—he caught his breath quickly. Through the open window of the limousine a white envelope fluttered and fell at his feet. The car was moving forward again. For the fraction of a second Jimmie Dale did not move, save to straighten rigidly as though from some sharply administered galvanic shock; and then, with a low cry—"the Tocsin!"—he was at the door, his head thrust out through the window, his fingers mechanically wrenching at the door handle. A mass of people were surging across the street toward the opposite corner. Eagerly his eyes swept over them; he pushed the door open a little as though to step out—and shut it again quickly, as, with a yell of warning, another

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car, jockeying for position as his own moved out into the stream of traffic, swept by from behind.

It had been quite useless—he knew that, he had known it subconsciously even at the moment when he had sprung to his feet. Apart entirely from the crowd, she would undoubtedly be in some clever disguise, and he could not have recognised her in any event.

He stooped, picked up the envelope, and sat down again quietly, his eyes travelling swiftly in the direction of his chauffeur. Benson's back was still imperturbably turned toward him. In the roar of dozens of motors all starting forward at once, Benson evidently had not heard the yell of warning, or, if he had, had been too much occupied with his own immediate duties to pay any attention to it.

Jimmie Dale tore the envelope open; and, in a sort of grim, feverish haste, unfolded the sheets which it had contained.

"Dear Philanthropic Crook—since you *will* be called that," he read. A quick, eager flush came to his cheeks. She knew now, since she had shown last night that she knew him as Smarlinghue, that, despite all her own brave, resolute protests, he was determined to fight this thing out to the end—separately, if she would not let him join forces with her—but, in any case, to the end. It was the old name again—Dear Philanthropic Crook! Did it mean that she had surrendered, then, at last, that she had finally accepted the situation, and that he was to enter this shadowland of hers beside her! The flush died away. It was only his own wish that had been father to the thought. This was another "call to arms" of quite a different nature, and born, not out of her own peril, but born, as in the old days again, out of the maze of her strange environment. "You have set New York ablaze, you have made me far more afraid for you than

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I am for myself; but I cannot see where there is any danger here, or else I would not have written this. You——" He was reading impetuously now, his brain, alert and keen, sorting and sifting out, as it were, the salient, vital points. ". . . old Colonel Milford and his wife . . . Louisiana . . . letter . . . family heirloom . . . French descent . . . old setting, three large diamonds pendant from necklet of smaller ones . . . ten to twelve thousand dollars . . . steel bond box . . . lower right-hand drawer of desk . . . plan of second floor . . . West 88th Street . . ."

He turned the page, studied for a moment the carefully drawn plan that covered the next sheet, then turned to the third and last page—and suddenly his face hardened. He had been called a jackal by the papers—but here were two who bore a clearer title to the name! He knew them both—Jake Kisnieff, better known as Old Attic in the underworld, as crooked as his own bent and twisted form, a miserly, cunning "fence," crafty enough, if report were true, to have garnered a huge, ill-gotten harvest under the nose of the police; and the other, one self-styled Henry Thorold, alias whatever occasion might require, smooth, polished, educated, the most dangerous of all types of crook, was the brains of a certain clique whose versatile operations were restricted only between the limits of porch-climbing and the callous removal, via the murder route, of any one when deemed expedient for either personal or financial reasons!

Jimmie Dale read on to the end of the page. His jaws were clamped together now, the square, determined chin out-thrust; and while one hand held the letter, the other curled into a clenched fist. It was dirty work—vile, miserable work—a coward's work! And then Jimmie Dale smiled grimly, as his eyes fell upon the glaring headline of the paper on the top of the pile beside him. Perhaps

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the *morning* papers would carry other headlines that would be still more startling!

He began to study the several sheets again, critically, carefully this time. There should be no danger here, she said. He knew what she meant—that she counted on his being able to nip the whole scheme in the bud. He shook his head thoughtfully. That might be true; he might be able to do that, probably would, for it was still very early; but if not—what then? He glanced out of the window—they were just turning into Riverside Drive. He looked at his watch. It wanted but a few minutes of seven—progress up the Avenue had been unusually slow. He tore the letter into small fragments, and reaching out through the window, let the pieces flutter away in the wind. It was none too early at that, and it was unfortunate that he must first of all go home—there were certain things there indispensable to the night's work. On the other hand, it was fortunate that he did not have to lose even more time by being obliged instead to go to the new Sanctuary for what he needed, fortunate that he had been "Jimmie Dale" last night when he had left Malay John's, and that he had gone directly home from there.

The car stopped. Benson sprang from his seat, and opened the door.

"Don't put up the car yet, Benson; I am going a little further uptown," said Jimmie Dale, with a pleasant nod—and ran up the steps of his house.

Jason, his butler, opened the door for him.

"I shall not be dining at home to-night, Jason." Jimmie Dale handed over his hat—not a suitable one for the evening's special requirements.

The old man's face wrinkled up in disappointment.

"That's too bad, sir, Master Jim." Jason took liberties; but they were the genuine heart liberties of a life-

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time's service—and why not, since, as he was fond of saying, he had dandled his Master Jim as a baby on his knee! "There was to be just what you are especially fond of to-night, Master Jim; the cook made a particular point of——"

"Yes; I know." Jimmie Dale's hand squeezed the old man's shoulder in friendly fashion. It was not the cook, but Jason, who would have originated the menu with the painstaking care and thoughtfulness of one dealing with a life-and-death matter. "But it can't be helped. I didn't know until just a little while ago, or I would have telephoned. I am going right out again."

"Very good, sir," Jason bowed. "Your clothes, Master Jim, are——"

"I shan't dress, Jason," said Jimmie Dale—and, crossing the reception hall, with its rich, oriental rugs, he ran up the wide staircase, opened the door of his "den," locked it behind him, and, switching on the lights, began to strip off his coat and vest, as he hurried toward the further end of the great, spacious, luxuriously appointed room that ran the entire depth of the house.

He threw coat and vest on a nearby chair; and, sweeping the portières away from in front of a little alcove, knelt down before the barrel-shaped safe with its multitudinous glistening knobs, that, in the days gone by when he had been with his father in the business of manufacturing safes, the business that had amassed the fortune he had inherited, he had designed himself. His fingers flew over the dials. He swung the outer and the inner doors open, reached inside, took out the leather girdle with its burglar kit, and fastened it around his waist. Then, slipping an automatic and a flashlight into his pocket, he closed the safe, drew the portières together, and put on his coat and vest again.

An instant later he was downstairs, and, selecting a

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soft slouch hat—Jason for the moment not being in evidence—went down the steps to his waiting limousine.

"The Marleton, Benson," he directed, as he stepped into the car. "And hurry, please."

The car started forward. It was not far to 88th Street, but the car would save time—and time was counting now, every minute of it priceless, if, as the Tocsin had intimated, he was to forestall the game that was in hand. The Marleton was for Benson's benefit—but the Marleton, unless he had miscalculated the numbers, was barely more than a block away from the house he sought.

And then, besides, there was another reason for haste—Colonel Milford and his wife would probably be at dinner now, and that left the upstairs part of the house at his disposal, since, apart from the elderly couple, the household consisted, according to the Tocsin, of only a single maid. He went over in his mind again the plan the Tocsin had drawn. Yes, she was quite right, there should be no danger, the whole matter as far as he was concerned was almost childishly simple and easy—if he were only in time! He shook his head a little impatiently at that; and, as he saw that they were approaching his destination, consulted his watch. It was exactly twenty minutes after seven.

The car rolled up to the curb in front of the fashionable family hotel. Jimmie Dale alighted.

"I shall not need you any more to-night, Benson," he said.

He walked quietly into the hotel, through the lobby, down a corridor, and out of the entrance that gave on the cross street—then his pace quickened. He traversed the block, crossed the road, turned the corner, and a minute later was approaching the house she had designated. It was one of a row. His pace slowed to a nonchalant stroll again. It was still quite light, and he was by no

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means the only pedestrian on the street; a moment's preliminary, even if cursory, examination of the exterior would not be amiss! Counting the numbers ahead of him, he had already located the house. He frowned a little. A light burned in the upstairs front room. There was a light in the lower hallway as well, but that was to be expected. Why the one upstairs? Had the Colonel and Mrs. Milford already finished their dinner?

Jimmie Dale reached the house—and casually, without hesitation, mounted the steps—and quite as casually, making a pretence of ringing the electric bell, opened the unlocked outer door, stepped into the vestibule, and, without a sound now, closed the door behind him.

He tried the inner door tentatively. It was locked, of course—but it was locked only for an instant. From the girdle under his vest came a little steel instrument; there was a faint, almost inaudible, protesting *snip* from the interior of the lock; and, his fingers turning the knob with a steady, silent pressure, he opened the door slightly.

Crouched there, he listened. And then, a smile of relief flickering on his lips, he pushed the door open, and slipped into the hallway. The explanation of the light upstairs was that it had probably been left burning inadvertently. They were still at dinner, for he could hear voices from the dining room at the rear of the hall.

As silent as a shadow now, Jimmie Dale, closing the inside door, moved across the hall, and went up the stairs. On the landing he paused; and then advanced cautiously. The light streamed out from the open door of the front room, and there was always the possibility that—no, a glance from where he stood close against the wall at the edge of the door jamb, showed him that the room was unoccupied.

He entered the room quickly, crossed quickly to a quaint old escritoire against the opposite wall, and

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stooped beside it. The lower right-hand drawer, she had said. The little steel instrument with which he had opened the vestibule door was still in his hand, but he did not use it now! Instead, with a low, dismayed ejaculation, as his fingers ran along the drawer edge, he dropped on his knees for a closer examination—and his lips closed tightly together.

He was too late! The first finger touch had told him that, and now his eyes corroborated it. The drawer had been forced by a jimmy of some sort, judging from the indentations in the wood. The lock was broken, and he pulled the drawer open. Inside lay the steel bond-box, its lid bent back, and wrenched and twisted out of shape. The box was empty.

Without disturbing the box, Jimmie Dale mechanically closed the drawer again and stood up, looking around him. In a subconscious way, when he had entered the room, he had been cognisant of a certain strangeness in its appointments, but then his mind had been centred only on the work in hand; now there seemed a sort of pitiful congruity in the surroundings themselves and in the old heirloom that had been stolen. It seemed as though the room spoke to him of past glories. The furniture was out-of-date, and, too, a little in disrepair. It seemed as though there clung about it the pride and station of other days, a station that it was finding it hard to maintain in these. And he thought he understood. It was a fine old family, that of the Milfords of Louisiana, a very proud old family in the way that it was fine to be proud—proud of its name, proud that its sons were gentlemen, proud of its loyalty to its own traditions and standards, a pride that neither condition nor adversity could mar. And now the diamond pendant was gone! He could well understand how they had clung to that. and——

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He started suddenly. Was he a fool, that he had wasted even a moment in giving play to his thoughts! Voices were reaching him now from below, footsteps were sounding from the lower hall, there was a creak upon the stairs. They were coming!

He had hardly any need for the quick, searching glance he flung around him—the plan that the Tocsin had drawn was mapped out vividly in his mind. He stepped backward softly through half-opened folding doors into the room in the rear. From this room a door, he knew, opened into the hallway. His escape, after all, need give him little concern. He had only to step out into the hall after they passed, and make his way downstairs. A woman's voice from the stairway came to him:

"My dear, you must have left the light burning."

"Unless it was you," a man's voice answered in good-humoured banter. "You were the last one in the room."

"But I am sure I didn't!" the feminine tones asserted positively.

The steps passed along the hall, and from behind the folding doors Jimmie Dale saw an elderly couple enter the front room. Both were in evening dress—and somehow, suddenly, at sight of them Jimmie Dale swallowed hard. The old gentleman, kindly, blue-eyed, white-haired, was very erect, very straight in spite of the fact that he must have been close to seventy years of age, and with the sweet-faced, old-fashioned little lady, with the gray hair, who stood beside him, they made a stately pair—for all that their clothes, past glories like the furniture, were grown a little shabby, a little threadbare. But with what a courtly air they wore them! And with what a courtly air now he led her to a chair, and bent over her, and lifted up her face, and held it tenderly between both his hands!

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"How well you look to-night in your dress," he said, and his blue eyes shone. "I am very proud of you."

She stroked the hand against her cheek.

"Do you remember the first time I ever wore it?" She was smiling up at him.

"Oh, yes!" he nodded his head slowly. "It is strange, isn't it? That was a long time ago when our friends were married back there in the old State, and to-night again, way up here in New York, they have not forgotten us on this their anniversary."

Silence fell for a moment between them.

Then he spoke again, a little sadly:

"Would you wish those days back again, if you could?"

She hesitated thoughtfully.

"I do not know," she said at last. "Sometimes I think so. We had John then."

"Yes," he said, and turned away his head.

Her hand, as Jimmie Dale watched, seemed to tighten over her husband's; and now, though her lips quivered, there came a little smile.

"But we have his memory now, dear," she whispered.

Agitated, the old gentleman moved abruptly away from the chair, and Jimmie Dale could see that the blue eyes were moist.

"That is true—we have his memory." The old colonel's voice trembled. And then his shoulders squared like a soldier on parade. "Tut, tut!" he chided. "Why, we are to be gay to-night! And it is almost time for us to be going. We, too, shall celebrate. You shall wear the pendant, just as you did that other night."

"Oh, colonel!" There was mingled delight and hesitation in her ejaculation. "Do you really think I ought to—that it wouldn't be out of keeping with our present circumstances?"

"Of course, I think you ought to!" he declared. "And

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see"—he started across the room—"I will get it for you, and fasten it around your throat myself."

He reached the escritoire, opened a little drawer at the top, took out a key, stooped to the lower drawer, inserted the key, turned it once or twice in a puzzled way, then tried the drawer, pulled it open—and with a sharp, sudden cry, reached inside for the steel bond-box.

The little old lady rose hurriedly, in a startled way, from her chair.

"What is it? What is the matter?" she cried anxiously.

The box clattered from the colonel's hands to the floor.

"It is gone!" he said hoarsely. "It has been stolen!"

"Gone!" She ran wildly forward. "Stolen! No, no—it cannot be gone!"

They stared for a moment into each other's faces, and from each other's faces stared at the rifled box upon the floor—and then a look of wan misery crept gray upon the little old lady, and she swayed backward.

With a cry, that to Jimmie Dale seemed one of more poignant anguish than he had ever heard before, the old gentleman caught her in his arms and supported her to a chair; then running quickly to the hall, called loudly for the maid below.

There was a merciless smile on Jimmie Dale's lips. He was retreating now further back into the room toward the door that gave on the hall.

"I wonder," said Jimmie Dale to himself through set teeth, "I wonder if a man wouldn't be justified in putting an end *for keeps* to that devil Thorold for this!"

He heard the maid come rushing up the stairs. He could no longer see into the other room now, but a confused mingling of voices reached him:

". . . The police . . . next door and telephone . . . the light . . . while we were at dinner . . ."

Jimmie Dale opened the door, slipped across the hall,

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made his way silently and swiftly down the stairs, and with the single precaution of pulling his slouch hat far down over his eyes, stepped boldly out of the front door, walked quietly down the steps, walked briskly, but without apparent haste, along the street—and turned the first corner.

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CHAPTER V

"DEATH TO THE GRAY SEAL!"

JIMMIE DALE hurried now, making his way to the nearest subway station, and took a downtown train. "There should be no danger," the Tocsin had written. His eyes darkened with a flash of passion. Danger! Danger was a small, pitiful factor now! He had been too late through no fault either of his or the Tocsin's—but he still knew where the pendant was, or would be! Time was counting again; he was afraid now only that he might be too late a second time. Old Attic would not let any grass grow under his feet in disposing of the diamonds through one of the many channels at his command, and once they had passed out of that scoundrel's hands they were as good as hopelessly lost. Also there was Thorold to reckon with. Thorold would naturally get the pendant first, then turn it over to Jake Kisnieff. Had Thorold already done so? It depended, of course, on when the theft had been committed. That snatch of conversation—"the light . . . when we were at dinner"—came back to him. His brows gathered. He crouched a little in his seat, staring abstractedly at the black tunnel walls without. Station after station was passed. Jimmie Dale's hand, resing on the window sill, was so tightly clenched that it seemed the skin must crack across the knuckles.

But he was smiling when he left the subway—only it was that same merciless smile once more. It was not

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alone the mere act of robbery that fanned his anger to a white heat. Again and again, he was picturing in his mind that fine old gray-haired couple; again and again he saw the old colonel bend and lift that sweet face to his, and saw them look into each other's eyes. There was something holy, something reverent in that love which the years had ripened and mellowed with tenderness; something that was profound, that made of this night's work a sacrilege in touching them—and that poor jewel, clung to all too obviously through adversity for its past associations, was probably the last real thing of intrinsic value they possessed!

"I am not sure," muttered Jimmie Dale—he was fingering the automatic in his pocket, "I am not sure that I can trust myself to-night!"

Ten minutes' walk from the subway brought him before a dingy and dilapidated three-story tenement on the East Side. The Nest, they called it in the underworld; and worthily so, for its roof sheltered more of the cheaper and petty class of criminals probably than any other single dwelling in New York—the steerers, the hangers-on, the stalls, those of the lesser breed of vultures, and the more vicious therefore, who at best made but a precarious livelihood from their iniquitous pursuits.

One of Jimmie Dale's shoulders was hunched forward, giving a crude and ill-fitting set to his fashionably tailored, Fifth Avenue coat; he staggered slightly, and the flap of his collar protruded, while his tie, pulled out, sprawled over his vest; also his slouch hat, badly crushed and looking as though it had rolled in the mire of the street, was tilted forward at an unhappy angle until it was balanced on the bridge of his nose. Men, women, and children passed him by—for the street was crowded—paying him not the slightest attention. He lurched

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in through the front door of the tenement, swayed up against the hallway inside—and stood there, still swaying a little.

It was dark here, and the atmosphere was musty and fetid; a murmur pervaded the place as of voices behind many closed doors, but apart from that the tenement might have been empty and deserted for all the signs of life it evidenced. And then the spot where Jimmie Dale had stood was vacant, and he was along the narrow hallway without a sound, and, opening a door at the rear, stood peering out. After a moment, he closed the door again without fastening it; and, back once more toward the front of the hallway, began to creep silently up the stairs.

He reached the top landing. Old Attic had two miserable rooms here, where he conducted his even more miserable business! Jimmie Dale dropped on his knees before the door that faced the head of the stairs, and placed his ear to the panel. Noiselessly he tried the door. It was locked. He was smiling that merciless smile again in the darkness, as his deft, slim fingers worked at the keyhole. He was not too late this time! Old Jake was there, and—yes, Thorold, too. They were even now haggling over the pendant—he could hear them quite distinctly now with the door open a crack.

He pushed the door open a little wider, but very slowly, scarcely an inch at a time. He was in luck again! They were in the inner room. He opened the door still a little wider, stepped softly over the threshold, and closed the door behind him.

Save for a dim light that filtered out through the half open door of the inner room, it was dark here. Slowly, with that almost uncanny, silent tread that he had acquired on the creaky, rickety stairs of the old Sanctuary, Jimmie Dale began to move forward, the weight of his

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body wholly and firmly on one foot before the other was lifted from the floor; and, as he advanced, the black silk mask, from a pocket in the leather girdle, was drawn over his face.

He could see them now quite plainly—the twisted, crunched-up form of old Jake, with his tawny-bearded face, and narrow, shifting little black eyes; the smooth-shaven, suave, oily, cunning countenance of Thorold, the super-crook. Both were sitting at a table in the miserly appointed room, whose only other articles of furniture were a cheap iron bed and a few chairs. Old Jake was whining; Thorold's voice held an angry rasp.

"Four thousand, you cursed miser, and not a cent less," Thorold was saying.

"Three," whined the other. "You ain't splitting fair. I got to take the stones out of their setting, and sell 'em for what I can get. Stolen stuff's got to go cheap. You know that."

"It's worth ten or twelve, and you'll get at least eight for it," growled Thorold. "That's four apiece—and I've got to split mine again with the guy that pinched it. Hurry up, d'yer hear—I've got a date with him in half an hour over in my office."

"Ha, ha!" cackled old Jake. "Are you trying to be funny? All the thief gets out of it from you won't make much of a hole in your share!"

"That's my business!" snapped Thorold. "You come across!"

"Three!" whined old Jake again.

"Four!" Thorold flung back angrily.

"Well, let's have a look at it then; I ain't seen it for years," grumbled old Jake. "I ain't trying to do you. We went into this thing so's we'd each get the same out of it; but I tell you it ain't easy to shove big stones when

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there'll be a police description out against them, and there ain't no big prices for 'em, either."

Thorold reached into his pocket—and even in the dull light of the single gas-jet that alone illuminated the room, Jimmie Dale caught the fire and flash of the magnificent stones in the pendant that swung to and fro now, as the man held it up.

Old Jake, his hand trembling with eagerness, snatched at it, and, as Thorold laughed shortly, dove his fingers into a greasy vest pocket, and produced a jeweller's magnifying glass, which he screwed into his eye.

"One of these has got a flaw, and it's cloudy," he mumbled.

"Never mind about the flaw! Flash your wad!" invited Thorold, with a thin smile.

Jimmie Dale's hand slipped under his vest to a pocket in the leather girdle, and from the thin metal case, with the aid of the tiny tweezers, lifted out a gray seal, and laid it lightly on the inside edge of his left-hand sleeve. He replaced the metal case with his right hand, and with his right hand drew his automatic from his pocket. He crept forward again, inch by inch toward the door of the inner room.

Old Jake laid the pendant on the table, and from some mysterious recess in his clothing pulled out a huge roll of banknotes.

"I'll make it three and a half until I see what I can get for it. That's all I've got here, anyway." He began to count the money, laying it bill by bill on the table. "If I get more than seven, I'll split the difference even. That's fair. That's the way it's been ever since we started this. I don't know exactly what I can get for this, and——"

And then Jimmie Dale was in the room, his automatic covering the two men.

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"Don't move please, gentlemen!" he said quietly, as he stepped to the table. His eyes behind the mask travelled from the diamond pendant to the pile of banknotes, and from the banknotes to the two men, whose faces had gone suddenly white, and who now sat rigidly in their chairs, as though turned to stone. "I appear to be in luck to-night!" His lips, just showing beneath the mask, parted in a hard smile. "I was passing by, and——" His left hand reached out, swept up the money and the diamond pendant—and in their place, fluttering from his sleeve, a gray seal fell upon the table.

There was a sharp, quick cry from Thorold—and the muzzle of Jimmie Dale's automatic swung like a flash to a level with the man's eyes. Old Jake had crumpled up now in his chair, and was glaring wildly at the little diamond-shaped piece of paper; he licked his lips with his tongue, there was fear in his eyes

"The Gray Seal! The Gray Seal!" he muttered hoarsely.

"I appear to be in luck to-night!" said Jimmie Dale again. "And"—he put the money and the diamond pendant coolly in his pocket—"it would be too bad if I didn't play it up, wouldn't it? It doesn't often come as easy as this. Amazing carelessness to leave that outside door unlocked! But, as I was saying, with such a lavish display of opulence on the table, one is almost led to hope that there might be more where that came from. Now——"

"I haven't got any more—not another cent! Honest, I haven't!" old Jake cried hysterically. "I swear to God, I haven't, and——"

"You hold your tongue!" There was a sudden snarl in Jimmie Dale's low tones. The man's voice was rising dangerously loud. "I'll attend to you in a moment!" He swung on Thorold again; and, with his pistol pressed

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close against the man, felt deftly and swiftly over the other in search of weapons. He laughed tersely, finding none. "Empty your pockets out on the table!" he ordered curtly.

The man hesitated.

Jimmie Dale smiled—unpleasantly.

Thorold swept a bead of sweat from his forehead. His lips were working nervously. All suavity and polish were gone now; there were only viciousness and fear, each struggling with the other for the mastery in the man's smug face.

"Damn you, you blasted snitch!" he burst out furiously. "We'll get you down here some day, and——"

"Some day, perhaps," said Jimmie Dale softly. "But to-night—did I explain that I was in a hurry—*Thorold!* Every pocket inside out, please!"

Thorold's hand went reluctantly to his pockets. He began with the inside pocket of his coat, laying a pile of letters and papers on the table.

"Anything there you want?" he sneered.

"Go on!" prompted Jimmie Dale.

From vest pockets came a varied assortment of articles—watch, cigars, a cigar-cutter, a silver-mounted pencil, and a fountain pen. The man's hands travelled to his outside coat pockets.

"The *inside* pocket of the vest, Thorold," suggested Jimmie Dale coldly.

With a malicious snort, Thorold unbuttoned his vest, and turned the pocket out. There was nothing in it.

Jimmie Dale nodded complacently.

"My mistake, Thorold," he murmured apologetically. "Go on!"

The man continued to denude himself of his effects, but with increasing savagery and reluctance. There was silence in the room—and then suddenly, so faint as to

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be almost inaudible, there was a soft *pat* upon the floor. Jimmie Dale did not turn his head.

"I think you dropped something, Jake," he observed pleasantly. "Now take your foot off it, and put it on the table!"

A miserable smile twisting his lips, old Jake stooped, picked up a roll of bills, and, mumbling and crooning to himself, laid it on the table. Jimmie Dale immediately transferred it to his pocket.

"Yes," he said, "I certainly seem to be in luck to-night! That all you got, Thorold?" He reached forward, and possessed himself of a well-filled wallet that Thorold had added to the heterogeneous collection in front of him.

Thorold's face was black with fury.

"There's the watch, you cheap poke-getter!" he choked. "Don't forget to frisk that while you're at it!"

Jimmie Dale examined the collection with a sort of imperturbable appraisement.

"No," he said judicially. "You can keep your watch, Thorold; I haven't got the same lay as our friend Jake here, and that sort of thing is too hard to get rid of to make it worth while. I'll take these, and that's all." He whipped the pile of letters and papers into his pocket. "You see, with a man of your profession, there is always the chance of there being something valuable amongst——"

Jimmie Dale never finished the sentence. With a sudden, low, tigerish cry, Thorold heaved the end of the table upward between himself and Jimmie Dale—and, quick as a cat, as Jimmie Dale staggered backward, leaped from behind it.

"Get him, Jake! Get him, Jake!" he cried. "He won't *dare* to fire in here for the noise. Get him, you fool, he——"

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But Jimmie Dale was the quicker of the two. A vicious left full on the point of Thorold's jaw stopped the man's rush—but only for the fraction of a second. Thorold, recovering instantly, flung his body forward, and his arms wrapped themselves around Jimmie Dale's neck. And now, old Jake, screeching like a madman, was circling around them, snatching, clawing, striking at Jimmie Dale's face and head.

Thorold was a powerful man; and at the first tight-locked grip, as they swayed together, trained athlete though he was himself, Jimmie Dale realised that he had met his match. Again and again, with all his strength he tried to throw the other from him. Around and around the room they staggered and lurched—and around and around them followed the wizened, twisted form of old Jake, like a hovering hawk, darting in at every opportunity for a blow, shrieking, yelling, cursing with infuriated abandon. And then from below, a greater peril still, came the opening and shutting of doors, voices calling—the tenement, at the racket, like a hive of hornets disturbed, was beginning to stir into life. If they caught him there! If they caught the Gray Seal there! It brought a desperate strength to Jimmie Dale. He had heard too often that slogan of the underworld—*death to the Gray Seal!*

He tore one of Thorold's arms free from his neck—they were cheek to cheek—Thorold was snarling out a torrent of blasphemy with gasping breath—he wrenched himself free still—and then, their two hands outstretched and clasped together as though in some grim devil's waltz, they reeled toward the bed at the far end of the room, and smashed into a chair. And, as they lost their balance, Jimmie Dale, gathering all his strength for the one supreme effort, hurled the other from him. There was a crash that shook the floor, as Thorold, hurtling

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backwards, struck his head with terrific force against the iron bedstead, and dropped like a log.

Jimmie Dale was on his feet again in an instant—but not before old Jake had run, yelling madly, from the room. A glance Jimmie Dale gave at Thorold, who lay limp and motionless, a crimson stream beginning to trickle over temple and cheek; then, with a bound, he reached the gas-jet, and turned out the light.

Old Jake's voice screamed from the hallway without:

"Help! The Gray Seal! The Gray Seal! Help! Help! Quick! The Gray Seal!"

The staircase creaked under the rush of feet; yells began to well up from below. Jimmie Dale darted into the outer room, and crouched down beside the doorway.

"Death to the Gray Seal!" The whole building, in a pandemonium of hellish glee, seemed to echo and re-echo the shout.

Jimmie Dale was deadly calm now, as his fingers closed around his automatic—and, deadly cool, the keen, alert, active brain was at work. It was black about him, pitch black, there were no lights in the hallway—yes, a dull glimmer now—a door farther along had opened—but dark enough in here where he waited. There was a chance—with the odds heavily against him—but it was the only way.

They were on the landing outside now; and now, old Jake shouting excitedly amongst them, a dozen forms swept through the doorway, and scuffling, stamping, yelling, made for the inner room—and Jimmie Dale slipped out into the hall. His lips pressed tightly together. That had been as he had expected, but the danger still lay before him—in the three flights of stairs. Some one was coming up now, more than one, the stragglers—but there would be stragglers until the last occupant of the tenement was aroused. He dared not wait. In a minute

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more, in less than a minute, they would have lighted the gas again in there and found him gone.

He jumped for the head of the stairs—a dark form loomed up before him. Jimmie Dale launched himself full at the other. There was a cry of surprise, an oath, the man pitched sideways, and Jimmie Dale sprang by. A yell went up from the man behind him; it was echoed by a wild chorus from above, as of wolves robbed of their prey; it was re-echoed by shouts from the stairways and halls below—and with his left hand on the bannisters to guide him, taking the stairs four and five at a time, Jimmie Dale went down—and now, aiming at the ground, his revolver spat and barked a vicious warning, cutting lurid flashes through the murk ahead of him.

Doors that were open along the hallways shut with a hurried bang; dark forms, like rats running for their holes, scuttled to safety; women screamed and shrieked; children whimpered. On Jimmie Dale ran. For the second time he crashed into a form, and won by. They were firing at him from above now—but by guesswork—firing down the stair well. The pound of feet racing down the stairs came from behind him—two flights behind him—he calculated he had that much start. He gained the entrance hallway where all was dark, leaped for the front door, opened it, pulled it shut with a violent slam—and, whirling instantly, running swiftly and silently back along the hall, he reached the rear door that he had left unfastened, darted out, and a moment later, swinging himself over a high, backyard fence, dropped down into the lane beyond. Whipping off his mask, he ran on like a hare until he approached the lane's intersection with a cross street. And here, well back from the street, he paused to regain his breath and rearrange his dishevelled attire; then, edging forward, he peered cautiously up and down—and smiled grimly—and stepped out on the

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street. He was a good block away from the tenement.

From the direction of the Nest came sounds of disorder and riot. A patrolman's whistle rang out shrilly. It had been as close a call perhaps as the Gray Seal had ever known—but, at that, the night's work was not ended! There was still the actual thief. Thorold had said he was to meet the man in his, Thorold's, office in half an hour to split their ill-gotten gains. Jimmie Dale's jaw squared. The thief! His hand at his side clenched suddenly. Would it be *only* the thief, or would he have to reckon with Thorold again as well? Could Thorold keep the appointment? It was a question of how badly Thorold was hurt, and that he did not know.

Jimmie Dale walked on another block, still another, then turned so as to bring him into, but well up, the street on which the tenement was situated. From here, far down the ill-lighted street, he could see a mob gathered outside the Nest. And then, as he stood hesitant, there came the strident clang of a bell, the beat of hoofs, and he caught the name of the hospital on the side of an ambulance as it tore by—and, at that, he swung suddenly about, and, making his way across to Broadway, boarded an uptown car.

Twenty minutes later, he closed the door of a telephone booth in a saloon on lower Sixth Avenue behind him, and consulting the directory for the number, called the hospital.

"This is police headquarters speaking," said Jimmie Dale coolly. "What's the condition of that tenement case with the broken head?"

"Hold the wire a minute," came the answer; and then, presently: "Not serious; but still unconscious."

"Thank you," said Jimmie Dale.

He hung up the receiver, and made his way out to the street. The coast was clear then, as far as Thorold was

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concerned. Jimmie Dale walked on halfway up the block, and turned into the lighted hallway of a small building whose second floor, above a millinery establishment, was rented out for offices. It was here that Thorold maintained what he called his "office." Mounting the stairs and emerging upon a narrow corridor, that was lighted at one end by a single incandescent, Jimmie Dale halted before a door that bore the legend: HENRY THOROLD—AGENT. Jimmie Dale's lips twisted into grim lines. Agent—of what? He glanced quickly up and down the corridor, slipped his little steel instrument into the lock, and opened the door.

He stepped inside, closing the door without re-locking it; and, using his flashlight now, moved forward, and entered a sort of inner office that was partitioned off from the rest of the room. There was a flat-topped desk here, a swivel chair, an armchair, a rather good drawing or two on the walls, and a soft yielding carpet underfoot. Thorold was far too clever to overdo anything—it was simply businesslike, with an air of modest success about it.

Jimmie Dale appropriated the swivel chair behind the desk. Half an hour from the time he had left the tenement! He should not have long to wait, for he had used up nearly, if not quite, all of that time already, and the thief would certainly have every incentive to be punctual. He laid his flashlight, turned on, upon the desk, and, taking his automatic from his pocket, examined it. There were still two cartridges remaining in the magazine. He slipped the weapon into the side pocket of his coat, and began to sort over the papers and letters he had taken from Thorold. He opened one—a letter—glanced at its contents—and nodded. It was the one to which the Tocsin had referred. He returned the others to his pocket, began to read the one in his hand—

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and suddenly, leaning forward, snapped out his light. *Was that a step coming up the stairs?*

He listened now intently. Yes, it was coming nearer. He laid down the letter on the desk, and put on his mask. Still nearer came the step. It had halted now before the door. And now the hall door opened and closed. Jimmie Dale sat motionless, except that his hand crept to his coat pocket, and from his coat pocket to the desk again. The door closed softly—a man had entered the outer room—and certainly a man who was no stranger to the place, for he was moving unerringly in the darkness toward the partition door. The man was in the inner office now, passing the desk, so close that Jimmie Dale could have reached out and touched him. There was a soft, rubbing sound as the man's hand felt along the wall for the electric light switch, a click, the room was suddenly flooded with light; and, with a low cry, blinking there in the glare, staring at Jimmie Dale's masked face —stood Colonel Milford.

And then the old gentleman swayed, and caught at the back of the armchair for support—upon the desk lay the diamond pendant, glittering under the light.

"My God!" he whispered. "What does this mean?"

"It means, colonel," said Jimmie Dale softly, "that Thorold couldn't come, that old Jake found one of the diamonds cloudy and with a flaw, and that the deal fell through—and it means, colonel, that you will never be called upon to steal Mrs. Milford's diamonds again; there is a letter here that——"

"The letter!" The old gentleman was staggering toward the desk. He reached out his hand for the letter, hesitated as though he were afraid that Jimmie Dale was only tantalising him, would never let him have it—and then with a little cry of wondrous gladness, he snatched it to him.

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"I'd destroy that if I were you," suggested Jimmie Dale quietly. "I don't imagine that Thorold or old Jake will ever bother you again, but there are lots of 'Thorolds' in New York." He motioned toward the pendant. "That is yours, too, colonel."

The old gentleman was fingering the letter over and over, as though to assure himself that it was actually in his possession; and into his blue eyes, as they travelled back and forth from the pendant to Jimmie Dale, there crept a half wondering, half wistful light.

"I do not know why you have done this for me, or who you are, sir," he said brokenly. "But at least I understand that in some strange way you have stepped in between me and—and those men. You—you know the story, then?"

"Only partially," said Jimmie Dale with a smile, as he shook his head. "But you need not——"

"I would wish to thank you, sir." The old Southerner was stately now in his emotion. "I can never do so adequately. You are at least entitled to my confidence." His face grew a little whiter; he drew himself up as though to meet a blow. "My boy, my son, sir, stole a large sum of money from the bank where he was employed in New Orleans. He was not suspected; and indeed, as far as the bank is concerned, the matter remains a mystery to this day. Shortly afterwards the Spanish war broke out. My son was an officer in a local regiment. He obtained an appointment for the front." The old gentleman paused; then he stood erect, head back, at salute, like the gallant old soldier that he was. "My son, sir, was a thief; but he redeemed Himself, and he redeemed his name—he fell at the head of his company, leading his men."

Jimmie Dale's eyes had grown suddenly moist.

"I understand," he said simply.

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"He wrote this letter to me, making a full confession of his guilt; and gave it to me, telling me not to open it unless he should not come back." The colonel's voice broke; then, with an effort, steadied again. "It would have killed his mother, sir. It strained our resources most severely to pay back the money to the bank, and I lied to her, sir—I told her that our investments were proving unfortunate. Two years ago I completed the final payment without the bank ever having found out where the money came from; and then we moved up here to New York. You see, sir, it was a little difficult to maintain our former position in Louisiana, and amongst strangers less would be expected of us. And then, sir, shortly after that, I do not know how, this letter was stolen, and for two years Thorold has held it over my head, threatening to make it public if I refused his demands. I gave him all the money I could get. I have thought sometimes, sir, that I should put a revolver in my pocket and come down here and shoot him like a dog—but then, sir, the story, I was afraid, would come out. Yesterday he made a final demand for five thousand dollars. I did not have the money. He suggested Mrs. Milford's pendant there. He promised to return the letter, and any sum above the five thousand that he could get for the diamonds. I knew he was lying about the money; but I believed he would return the letter, knowing that I now had nothing left. That is why I am here to-night."

Again the old gentleman paused. It was very still in the room. Jimmie Dale had taken the thin metal case from his leather girdle and was fingering it abstractedly. And then the colonel spoke again:

"And so," he said slowly, "I stole the pendant this afternoon, and pretended to-night that it was done at dinner-time, and—and pretended, too, to make the dis-

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covery of the theft myself. You see, sir, it was not only the old name that would be smirched—there was the boy to think of, and he had redeemed himself. And Mrs. Milford would have wanted me to do that, to take a thousand of her jewels, if she had had them, if she had known—but, you see, sir, she could not know without it breaking her heart—I think the dearest thing in life to her is the boy's memory."

Outside on Sixth Avenue an elevated train roared and thundered by—it seemed strangely extraneous and incongruous.

"And now, sir"—the old gentleman's voice seemed tired, a little weary—"though you give me back the pendant, I do not see how I can return it to my wife. It was part of the agreement that I should notify the police—it made it impossible for me to inform against Thorold, for—for I was the thief."

Jimmie Dale nodded. "I was thinking of that," he said.

He opened the metal case; and, while the old gentleman watched in amazement and growing consternation, he lifted out a gray paper seal with his tweezers, moistened the adhesive side with the tip of his tongue, and pressed the seal firmly with his coat sleeve over the central cluster of the pendant.

The old gentleman tried twice to speak before a word would come.

"You! You—the Gray Seal!" he stammered at last. "But only to-night I was reading in the papers, and they said you were a murderer, an ogre of hell, and——"

"And now, possibly," interrupted Jimmie Dale whimsically, "though circumstances will force you to keep your opinion to yourself, you may have an idea that, as between you and the papers, you are the better informed. Well, at least, the Gray Seal's shoulders are broad! You need not worry about Thorold or old Jake;

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I took pains to make them aware that the Gray Seal—quite inadvertently, of course—had taken a passing fancy to the pendant. You have only to wrap it up, and send it by mail to *yourself;* and when it arrives"—he laughed softly, as he stood up—"notify the police again. Let them do the theorising—it is one of their cherished amusements! And, oh, by the way, colonel, have you any idea how much Thorold and his precious friend Kisnieff have blackmailed you out of in the last two years?"

"I did not have very much left when I came to New York," said the colonel, in a stunned way, still staring at the gray paper seal. "Between four and five thousand dollars."

"That's too bad," murmured Jimmie Dale. He took the banknotes from his pocket, and laid them on the desk. "I am afraid it is not quite all here—but I can assure you it is all they had."

He held out his hand.

"But you're not going! You're not going that way!" tried the colonel, and his eyes filled suddenly. "How am I to repay you, how am I to——"

"Very easily," smiled Jimmie Dale; "and, to use your own expression, very adequately—by remaining here, say, three minutes after I have left." He caught the colonel's hand in his and wrung it hard—and then, with a "Good-night!" flung over his shoulder, Jimmie Dale was gone.

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CHAPTER VI

THE REHABILITATION OF LARRY THE BAT

THE small French window of the new Sanctuary, that gave on the dirty little courtyard which, in turn, paralleled a black and narrow lane, with its high, board fence, opened cautiously, noiselessly. A dark form slipped silently into the room. The window was closed again. The dilapidated roller shade was drawn down, and, guided by the sense of touch, the rent that gaped across it was carefully pinned together. There was no moon to shine in through the top-light and uncharitably disclose the greasy, ragged carpet, or the squalor of the room.

The dark form, like a shadow, moved across the room to the door, tried the lock, slipped an inner bolt into place, then returned halfway back to the windows, and paused by the wall. A match flame spurted through the blackness; and then, hissing as though in protest, the miserable, clogged gas-jet, blue with air, still leaving the corners of the room dim and murky, grudgingly lighted up its immediate surroundings—and Jimmie Dale, immaculate in evening clothes, stood looking sharply about him.

Here and there about the room, upon this article and that, as though fixing its exact and precise location, his glance fell critically; then he stepped back quickly to the door, and knelt by the threshold. The tiny, unobtrusive

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piece of thread, that must break if the door were opened by but that fraction of an inch, was still intact. No one, then, had been here since last, as Smarlinghue, the seedy, drug-wrecked artist, he had left the place the day before; for, on entering, he had already satisfied himself that the French window had not been tampered with.

A hard smile flickered across his lips. It was a grim transition, this, from the luxury, the wealth and refinement of New York's most exclusive club, which he had left but half an hour ago! The smile faded, and he passed his hand a little wearily across his eyes. The strain seemed to grow heavier every day—the underworld more prone to suspicion; the police more vigilant; that ominous slogan, in which Crime and the Law for once were one, "Death to the Gray Seal!" to ring more constantly in his ears. It was becoming more fraught with peril, danger and difficulty than ever before, this dual life he led. And he had thought it all ended—once. That was only a few months ago, when the way had seemed clear for them both, for the Tocsin and himself. Well, he was here to-night to end it again if he could—by playing perhaps the most desperate game he had ever attempted.

He shook his head. It was more than the hazard, the danger and the peril of his dual life that brought the strain—it was the Tocsin, his love for her, *her* peril and *her* danger, the unbearable anxiety and suspense on her account that was never absent from him. And it was that that kept him in the underworld, that had forced him to create again a rôle in gangland, the rôle of Smarlinghue, in the hope that he might track her enemies down. She would not help him. If she knew, and she must know, the authors of this new danger that had driven her once more into hiding, she would not tell him. She

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was afraid—for *him*. She had said that. She had said that she would fight this out alone, that she would not, could not, whatever the end might be, bring him again into the shadows, throw his life again into the balance. It was her love, pure, unselfish, a wondrous love, that had prompted her to this course, he knew that—and yet—— But why all this again! His brain was numbed with its incessant dwelling upon it day after day.

Jimmie Dale's hands clenched suddenly. That night, a week ago, when he had been so nearly caught in the Nest, had brought very forcibly upon him the realisation that he could not risk any longer a haphazard course of action, if he was to be of help to her, for next time his own luck might go out. And so the idea had come—the one, single, definite mode of attack that lay within his power—and he had used the week to advantage, and he was ready now. From the first it had seemed almost certain that the danger which threatened her must come from one of two sources—and there was a way to probe one of these to the bottom. He did not know who they were, those who remained of the Crime Club, or where they were; but he knew the Magpie, and he knew where the Magpie was to be found—and to-night he would know, settling the question once for all, *all* that the Magpie knew!

He turned, walked back across the room, and, a few feet along from the door, knelt down close to the wall. An instant later, with the loose section of the base-board removed, he reached inside, and took out a curious assortment of garments, which he laid on the floor beside him. They were not Smarlinghue's clothes—they were even more shoddy and disreputable. His brows gathered critically as he surveyed the wretched boots, the mismated socks, the frayed, patched trousers, the greasy

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flannel shirt, the ragged coat, and the battered, shapeless slouch hat. Matched closely enough to the originals to pass without question, gathered from here and there, painstakingly, with infinite trouble during the week that had passed, were the clothes of—Larry the Bat.

It was a dangerous, almost desperate chance; but he, too, was desperate now. To be caught, even to be seen as Larry the Bat meant flinging every stake he had in life into the game. More rabid than ever was the cry of the populace for vengeance upon the Gray Seal; more active than ever, combing den and dive, their dragnet spreading from end to end of the city, were the efforts of the police to effect the Gray Seal's capture; more like snarling wolves than ever, the blood lust upon them, mad to sink their fangs into the Gray Seal, were the denizens of the underworld—and populace and police and underworld alike knew Larry the Bat as the Gray Seal! If he were seen—if he were caught! They had thought that Larry the Bat had perished in the Sanctuary fire that night, and that in Larry the Bat had perished the Gray Seal. But the Gray Seal had been at work again since then; and, logically enough, there had followed the deduction that, after all, Larry the Bat had in some way escaped.

Jimmie Dale began to remove his expensively tailored dress suit. It had made it much easier for him, easier to play the rôle of Smarlinghue, easier for the Gray Seal to work, that they, the populace, police and underworld, had of late searched only for a *character,* a character that, in truth, until to-night had literally vanished from the face of the earth—a character known as Larry the Bat. But now Larry the Bat was to assume tangible form again, to accept the risk of recognition, to go out amongst those whose one ambition was his destruction, to court his own death, his ruin, the disclosure that Larry

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the Bat was Jimmie Dale, that Jimmie Dale, the millionaire clubman, a leader in New York's society, was therefore the Gray Seal, and with this disclosure drag an honoured name in the mire, be execrated as a felon. It seemed almost the act of a fool—worse than that, indeed! Even a fool would not invite the blow of a blackjack, the thrust of a knife, or a revolver bullet from the first crook in gangland who recognised him; even a fool would not voluntarily take the chance of thrusting his head through the door of one of Sing Sing's death cells!

And for an instant, fought out with himself times without number though this had been since he had first conceived the plan, Jimmie Dale hesitated. It was very still in the room. In his hands now he held a bundle of neatly folded clothing ready to be tucked away in the aperture in the wall. He looked around him unseeingly. Then suddenly the square jaw clamped hard, and he stooped, thrust the bundle into the opening, and began rapidly to dress again—as Larry the Bat.

If it was the act of a fool, it was even more the act of a *coward* to shrink from it! It was the one way to force the Magpie to lay his cards face up upon the table. It was the Magpie who had discovered that Larry the Bat was the Gray Seal; it was the Magpie who had led gangland to batter down the Sanctuary doors; it was the Magpie who had clamoured the loudest of them all for the Gray Seal's death—and it was the Magpie, therefore, who had reason to fear Larry the Bat as he would fear no other living thing on earth. And it was upon that which he, Jimmie Dale, counted—the psychological effect upon the Magpie on finding himself suddenly face to face and in the power of Larry the Bat, with the unhallowed reputation of the Gray Seal, that did not stop at murder, to discount any thought in the Magpie's mind that the

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choice between a full confession and death was an idle threat which would not be put into instant execution.

Yes; it was simple enough, and *sure* enough—that part of it. The Magpie would tell what he knew under those circumstances—and tell eagerly. But if, after all, the Magpie knew nothing! Jimmie Dale snarled contemptuously at himself. Childish! That, of course, was possible—but in that case he would at least have run a false lead to earth, and have eliminated the Magpie from any further consideration.

Jimmie Dale took out a make-up box from the opening in the wall, and, carrying it with him to the table, propped up a small mirror against a collection of Smarlinghue's paint tubes. His fingers were working swiftly now with sure, deft touches, supplying to his face, his neck, his hands and wrists, not the unhealthy pallor of Smarlinghue, but the grimy, unwashed, dirty appearance of Larry the Bat. It was the toss of a coin, heads or tails, whether the Magpie was at the bottom of this or not. The Magpie knew that Silver Mag had been in the affair that night when Larry the Bat was discovered to be the Gray Seal; the Magpie knew that Silver Mag was a pal of Larry the Bat, and, therefore, equally with the Gray Seal, the underworld had passed sentence of death upon her—but did the Magpie know that Silver Mag was Marie LaSalle, any more than he knew that Larry the Bat was Jimmie Dale? That was the question—and its answer would be wrung from the Magpie's lips to-night!

A piece of wax was inserted in each nostril, and behind the lobes of his ears, and under his lip. Jimmie Dale stared into the mirror—the vicious, dissolute face of Larry the Bat leered back at him. And then, returning abruptly to the loosened section of the base-board, he restored the make-up box to its hiding place. He reached inside again, and procured a pistol and flashlight,

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which he stowed away in his pockets; there would be no need to-night for that belt with its compact little kit of burglar's tools; no need for that thin metal box with the gray-coloured, adhesive paper seals, the insignia of the Gray Seal, for to-night the Gray Seal would appear in *person*. No—wait! That collection of little steel pick-locks—and a jimmy! He would need those. He felt for them in one of the pockets of the leather girdle, transferred them to the pocket of his ragged trousers, and slipped the base-board back into place.

And now he stepped to the gas-jet, and turned out the light. Then the roller shade was raised, the French window silently opened, silently closed—and Larry the Bat, hugging close against the wall of the building, crept to the fence, and, lifting aside a loose board, passed out into the lane, and from the lane to an empty and drearily-lighted cross street.

There was no "sanctuary" now. Who in the underworld would fail to recognise Larry the Bat! He was out in the open, on the fringes of the Bad Lands, where recognition was to be feared from every passer-by, and where, if caught, he would do well and wisely to use his own automatic upon himself! And he must go deeper still, into the heart of gangland, to reach that room in the basement beneath Poker Joe's gambling hell where the Magpie lived—or, rather, burrowed himself away in those hours that were miserly devoted to sleep.

But Jimmie Dale knew his East Side as no other man in New York knew it; knew it as a man whose life again and again had depended solely upon that knowledge. By lane and alley, by unfrequented streets, now running, now crouched motionless in some dark corner waiting for footsteps to die away along the pavement before he darted across the street in front of him, Jimmie Dale threaded his way through the East Side, as through the

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twistings and turning of some maze, puzzling, grotesque and intricate, but with whose secrets notwithstanding he was intimately familiar.

When he paused at last, it was in a backyard, which he had entered by the simple expedient of climbing the fence from the lane behind. A low building loomed up before him, whose windows at first glance were dark, but through whose carefully closed blinds and tightly drawn shutters might still be remarked, if one were sufficiently inquisitive, the faint, suffused glow of lights from within.

Jimmie Dale scarcely glanced at the windows. Poker Joe's at this hour—it must be close to eleven o'clock, he calculated—would be just about settling into its night's swing. He was quite well aware both that the place was lighted and that there were by now perhaps a score of gangland's élite already at the tables; and that the blinds and shades were closed and drawn interested him only in that it safeguarded him *without* from being seen by any one from *within!*

But there was another window upon which Jimmie Dale now centred his entire attention—a narrow, oblong window, cellar-like, just on a level with the ground—and here there was neither a light nor a drawn shade. He stole across the yard, and, five yards from the wall of the house, dropped down on his hands and knees, and crawled silently forward. Keeping a little to one side, he reached the window, and lay there listening intently. There was no sound, save a low, almost inaudible murmur of voices from the windows above him—nothing from the direction of that dark, oblong window that he could reach out and touch now. The Magpie was presumably not at home!

The long, slim, tapering fingers, whose nerves, tingling sensitively at the tips, were as eyes to Jimmie Dale, those

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fingers that, to the Gray Seal, were like some magical "open sesame" to the most intricate safes and vaults, felt along the window sill, and, from the sill, made a circuit of the sash. The window, he found, was hinged at one side and opened inward; and now, under the pressure of his steel jimmy, inserted between the ledge and the lower portion of the frame, it began to yield.

Lying there on the ground, Jimmie Dale, his head close to the opening, listened with strained attention again. He had not made much noise, scarcely any—not enough even to have aroused the Magpie if, say, by any chance, the Magpie were within asleep. The sounds from the floor above seemed to be louder now, to reach him more distinctly, but from the basement room itself there was nothing, no sound even of breathing.

Satisfied that the room was unoccupied, Jimmie Dale pushed the window wide open, and peered in. It was like looking into some dark cavernous hole, and he could not distinguish a single object. Then his hand slipped into his pocket for his flashlight, and the round, white ray shot downward and around the place. The floor of the room was perhaps five feet below the level of the window sill; to the left, against the wall, was a bed; there was a chair, a table sadly in need of repair, a few garments hanging from nails driven haphazardly into the plaster, and, save for a dirty piece of carpet on the floor, nothing else. The flashlight played slowly around the room. Opposite the window was the door, and suspended from the centre of the ceiling was a single incandescent lamp.

With a sort of grim nod of approval, Jimmie Dale snapped off his flashlight, and, turning around, worked himself in through the window feet first, and dropped silently to the floor. He had only to wait now until the

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Magpie returned—whether it was a question of hours or minutes.

Jimmie Dale made his way to the chair, and sat down—and again he nodded his head grimly. It was very simple; he had only to wait, and this place, this burrow of the Magpie's, could not have been improved upon for his purpose. It was eminently suitable, so suitable that there seemed something ironical in the fact that it should have been the Magpie who had chosen it. One could commit *murder* here, and none would be the wiser—and none would be more keenly alive to that than the Magpie himself! A threat from the Gray Seal in these surroundings left nothing to be desired. They were making too much noise above to hear anything in this room below the ground, and the little window afforded an instant means of escape without the slightest danger of discovery. Yes; the Magpie, not being a fool, would very thoroughly appreciate all this.

Time passed. It was a nerve racking vigil that Jimmie Dale kept, sitting there in the chair—waiting. It was so dark he could not have seen his hand before his face. And it was silent, in spite of that queer composite sound of voices, and shuffling feet, and the occasional squeak of chair legs from above—a silence that seemed to belong to this miserable hole alone, that seemed immune from all extraneous noises. And after a time, in a curious way, the silence seemed to palpitate, to beat upon the ear-drums, to grow almost uncanny.

His lips tightened a little, and he smiled commiseratingly at himself. His nerves were getting a little too tautly strung, that was all; he was listening too intently for that expected step upon the stair, for the opening of that door he faced. And it was not like him to have an attack of nerves—and especially in view of the fact that his plan, in the simplicity of its execution did not even

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warrant anxiety for its success. He had only to remain quiet until the Magpie entered and turned on the light, then clap his automatic to the Magpie's head—the psychology of fear would do the rest. And yet—what was it? As the minutes dragged along, fight it as he would, a distinct depression, a panicky sort of uneasiness, was settling down upon him. The darkness, in a most unpleasant and disconcerting way, seemed to be full of eeriness, of warnings.

For perhaps ten minutes he sat there in the chair, silent and motionless, angry, struggling with himself—but his disquietude would not down; rather, it but grew the stronger, until it took the form of imagining that he was not *alone* in the room. He scowled contemptuously at himself. There was another psychology than that of fear—the psychology of suggestion. That silence, palpitating in his ear-drums, began to whisper: "You are not alone here—you are not alone—you are not alone."

Was that a sound there outside the door? A step cautiously approaching? He leaned forward tensely. No—his laugh was low, short, furious—*no!* It was only from above, that sound.

Jimmie Dale's face hardened. It was childish, this sensation of *presence* in the room; but it was also unnerving. Why should so unusual a thing happen to him to-night? Was it purely over-wrought nerves, due to the strain of the peril he ran as Larry the Bat—or was it intuition? Intuition had never failed him yet. Well, whatever it was, he would put a stop to it. He was here to-night to get the Magpie, and nothing should interfere with that. Nothing! He and the Magpie would square accounts to-night—and square them once for all!

Not alone here in the Magpie's den—eh? His flashlight streamed out, and began slowly and deliberately to circle the room. If his brain was so restless and active

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that it must indulge in fantasies, it could at least be diverted into another channel than—— Jimmie Dale strained forward suddenly in his chair. That was a pair of boots there at the foot of the bed. There was nothing strange in a pair of boots, but these boots were poised most curiously on their heels, with the toes pointing upward. They just barely protruded from the foot of the bed, which accounted for his not having been able to see them from the window when he had flashed his light around—he could not see the upper portions of them even now. And then, under his breath, Jimmie Dale jeered at himself again. True, the boots were in a most peculiar position, but had his nerves reached the state where a pair of boots would throw him into a panic! How logical for some one to be hiding there under the bed—with his feet in plain view! And yet what held the boots upright like that? The foot of the bed itself? Jammed there, perhaps? Or——

"Damn it!" gritted Jimmie Dale. "I'm worse than a child to-night!"

He rose from his chair, stepped across the room to the foot of the bed—and like a man dazed, his flashlight playing on the boots, his automatic flung forward in his hand, he stood staring downward, following his flashlight's ray with his eyes. Was he mad! Was his brain now playing him some hideous trick! The boots were not empty, he could see a man's ankles, the bottoms of a man's trousers; but the ankles and the trousers seemed utterly insignificant—*on the sole of the right boot was a diamond-shaped, gray-coloured, paper seal!* His own insignia—the insignia of the Gray Seal!

For an instant it might have been, he stood there rigidly, realising in a sort of ghastly, subconscious way that the man under the bed made no movement, made no attempt to evade discovery, made no sound; and then

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Jimmie Dale stooped quickly, and raised one of the other's feet a few inches from the floor. It fell back—a dead weight.

Jimmie Dale's jaws were hard clamped. There was devil's work here—some of the Magpie's, possibly. Every faculty alert now, Jimmie Dale was quietly lifting aside the small iron bed. The Magpie was no fool! By underworld and police alike it would be accepted without question that the Gray Seal had held a day of reckoning in store for the Magpie. Had the Magpie traded on that—to get rid of some one who was in his way, this outstretched, inert thing on the floor, and lay it to the door of the Gray Seal? It was clever, hellish in its cunning. And it would appear plausible enough. The Gray Seal had come here, say, searching for the Magpie, and in the darkness had struck another down! Yes, the Magpie could get away with that. It would stand to reason that the Magpie would not lure a victim to his own den, and——

A low cry was on Jimmie Dale's lips. The bed was moved out now, and he was stooping over a man whose head was gruesomely battered above the right temple and back across the skull. The flashlight wavered in his hand, as he held it focussed on the other's face. It was the Magpie—dead.

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CHAPTER VII

IT seemed to Jimmie Dale that, in the darkness, the room was full of unseen devils laughing and jeering derisively at him. It seemed that reality did not exist; that only unreality prevailed. The Magpie—dead! It seemed for the moment that he had utterly lost his grip upon himself; that mentally he was being tossed helplessly about, the sport of fate. The Magpie—*dead!* It meant—what did it mean? He must think now, and think quickly. It meant, first of all, that any hope for the Tocsin which he had built upon the Magpie was shattered, gone forever. And it meant, that gray seal on the sole of the dead man's boot, that the murder had been committed with even greater cunning and finesse, and an even greater security for the murderer, than he had attributed to the Magpie a moment since, when he had thought the Magpie the instigator, and not the victim, of the crime.

He was examining the wound, searching for the weapon—it must have been a blunt instrument of some sort—with which the blow, or blows, had been struck. There was nothing. The Magpie lay there—dead. That was all.

Mechanically Jimmie Dale replaced the bed in its original position over the murdered man, and stood staring down again at the gray seal on the Magpie's boot. It was not *why* the Magpie had been murdered, it was

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who had murdered him! Once, long, long ago, almost at the outset of the Gray Seal's career, a spurious gray seal had been used before. But this was a vastly different, and far more significant matter. Then it had been an attempt to foist the identity of the Gray Seal upon a poor, miserable devil in order to secure a reward—here it was a crime, *murder,* coolly, callously laid to the Gray Seal, that the guilty man might escape without a breath of suspicion, Just another crime credited to the Gray Seal! No one would dispute it; no one would question it; no one would dream that it had been done by any one other than the Gray Seal. There was a brutal possibility about the ingenuity of the man who had struck the blow. It was the Magpie who had put his finger upon Larry the Bat as the Gray Seal; it was the Magpie who had tried to accomplish the Gray Seal's death. Would it, then, occasion even surprise that the Magpie should be found murdered in his own den at the hands of the Gray Seal? It was even his own argument, the very reason that had led him to assume the rôle of Larry the Bat, and had brought him here to the Magpie's to-night!

Jimmie Dale bent down for a closer inspection of the diamond-shaped gray seal on the boot's sole. It was not one of his own; but it was so similar that it would unquestionably pass muster. The red crept to Jimmie Dale's cheeks and burned there, as a sudden, merciless anger swept upon him. *Who* was the man who had done this, who sheltered himself from murder behind the Gray Seal!

He laughed low and bitterly. Only another crime attributed to the Gray Seal! It would not smirch the Gray Seal any—the Gray Seal had been accused of worse than this! But the man who had dared to place that gray seal there would answer for it!

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He was still laughing in that low, bitter way, as he knelt now, and took out his pocketknife. The gray seal, at least, would not be found—he was lucky there—he had only to scrape it off, and—— No—wait! Would it not be better to leave it there? It would throw the murderer off his guard if he believed that his plan had worked; and it could make little difference to the Gray Seal's record to be held guilty of another murder—temporarily. Temporarily! Yes, that was it! Here was one crime of which the Gray Seal would be vindicated, and the guilty man be——

"Jimmie!"

It seemed to quiver, low-breathed, through the darkness—his name. His name! Was he bereft of all his senses! His name! Here in this horrible murder hole! Was he indeed mad with his imaginings, with these voices that had been whispering, and laughing, and jeering at him out of the blackness! And, absurdly, it had seemed this time that it was the Tocsin's voice!

"Jimmie—quick! On the floor under the window!"

He whirled like a flash. Mistake! Imaginings! No! It *was* the Tocsin! It was her voice! The gleam of his flashlight cut the black, and, leaping across the room, played upon the small, narrow, oblong window—it was from there the voice had come. But it was only black and empty there. And around the room his flashlight swept, and it was black and empty there, too—except for a square, white object upon the floor below the window. She was gone.

And it was like a half sob that came from Jimmie Dale's lips.

"Gone!" he whispered miserably. "Gone!"

Why had she gone like that? Why had she not waited—just for a moment, just for the single instant, if he could have had no more, that he would have given his

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life to have? And the answer was in his soul. He knew, and he knew that she, too, knew, that it would not have been a moment or an instant—that he would never have let her go again. And to follow her? He shook his head. By the time he had climbed out of the window, what trace, any more than there was now, would there be of her! She was gone—a sort of finality in her act, as there always was, that left nothing to be done, or said.

But the note! That white thing there upon the floor! He crossed the room, picked it up, tore it open, and, with his flashlight upon it, began to read.

"Jimmie—Jimmie——" It was scrawled in haste, only a few lines. His eyes travelled rapidly over the words, and suddenly his breath came fast.

"My God!" he cried out sharply.

As though he could not have read aright, he read again; disjointed words and phrases muttered audibly:

". . . Afraid not in time . . . hurry . . . this afternoon . . . the Magpie and Virat . . . Kenleigh, insurance broker . . . safe in Kenleigh's house . . . ground floor—left . . . one hundred thousand dollars . . . bonds . . . will try it . . . Meighan of headquarters . . . half-past one at Virat's . . . Gray Seal . . . Larry the Bat . . . if dangerous, keep away . . ."

One glance around the room Jimmie Dale gave instinctively; and then he was crawling through the window, and, outside, regaining his feet, he darted across the yard, and out into the lane. Kenleigh, the insurance broker—he repeated the address she had given in the note over to himself. It was an apartment house on Fifth Avenue near Washington Square.

He ran on, as he had come, through lane and alley, working his way out of the Bad Lands. It was dangerous, of course, in any case, but once clear of that section

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of the city which houses the underworld, his risk of discovery was greatly minimised, since, though familiar to every denizen of gangland, Larry the Bat was naturally not the same intimate figure in the more law-abiding and respectable districts; and he should, except for an extraordinary piece of bad luck, pass in the quarters he was now heading for as no more than exactly what his appearance proclaimed him to be—a disreputable and seedy vagrant.

It was slow work, hurry as he would, doubling and zigzagging his way up through the East Side; discouraging, when time was so great a factor, to cover three and four times the actual distance in order to keep to the lanes and alleys whose shelter he dared not leave; but he was spurred on now by a sort of grim, unholy joy. He knew now who had murdered the Magpie, and why; he knew now who was making a tool, a cat's-paw of the Gray Seal; he knew now who had so cynically elected him, if caught, as a substitute for the other to the electric chair. It was Virat! Frenchy Virat, the suave, sleek gambler, confidence man and crook! Well, the game was of Virat's choosing—and they would play it out now to the end, Virat and the Gray Seal, if it was the last act of his, Jimmie Dale's, life! It was only a question now of whether or not Virat had completed all his work, of whether there was yet time to get to Kenleigh's.

It was close to midnight, as Jimmie Dale came out on Washington Square. He crossed to Waverly Place, and, on the point of starting along Fifth Avenue, drew suddenly back around the corner. A man, walking rapidly, was just turning into Fifth Avenue from the opposite corner. Jimmie Dale drew in his breath sharply. He had got out of sight just in time. He recognised the quick, springy walk of the other. It was Meighan, of Headquarters. And then Jimmie Dale smiled a little

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whimsically. They were both bound for the same place, he and Meighan, of Headquarters—Kenleigh's apartment, that was a little way further on there along the Avenue.

A short distance behind the other, but on the opposite side of the street, Jimmie Dale followed the detective. There was hardly any use now in going to Kenleigh's, for, if the detective was really bound for there, it made his, Jimmie Dale's, errand useless—the summoning of the Headquarters' man was *prima facie* evidence that the robbery had already been committed. And yet a certain grim curiosity remained. Just how had it been done? And, besides, she had said, "half-past one at Virat's," so there was time to spare. The distorted lips of Larry the Bat thinned ominously. No; it was not useless even now. He had a very strong personal interest in all that had taken place—Virat would be the less likely to slip through his fingers, or through the fingers of the law, for the information that the scene of the robbery might supply!

Meighan disappeared suddenly inside an apartment house, which Jimmie Dale recognised as a rather fashionable one, devoted exclusively to bachelors' quarters. Jimmie Dale quickened his step, walked on to the next corner, crossed the street, and came back along the block. As he approached the apartment-house entrance, voices reached him from the vestibule, and then he heard the closing of a door.

"Ground floor—left," murmured Larry the Bat to himself. He smiled facetiously. "Saves an interview with the janitor!"

He glanced sharply around him in all directions—and the next instant was inside the vestibule—and in another, without a sound, was crouched close against the apartment door. A delicate little steel picklock was working now, the deft fingers manipulating it silently,

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and then stealthily he pushed the door open a crack. A man's voice, agitated, came to him from within:

". . . Perhaps twenty minutes, I don't know—the length of time it took you to get here. I was dining out. I 'phoned Headquarters the instant I came in."

Jimmie Dale pushed the door further open, slipped through, and left the door just ajar behind him. He was in the hallway of a very small apartment, of not more than two or three rooms, he judged. Diagonally ahead of him a light streamed out from an open door. He stole toward this, and, pressed close against the jamb of the door, peered in.

It was a sort of sitting-room, or den, cosily furnished with deep, comfortable lounging chairs. There was a flat-topped desk in the centre, a telephone on the desk; and at the rear of the room a connecting door, leading presumably to the bedroom, was open. A clean-shaven, dark-eyed man of perhaps thirty-five, Kenleigh obviously, was pacing nervously up and down. His face was pale, his hair ruffled; and, in his distraction, apparently, he had forgotten to remove the cloak which he was wearing over his evening clothes. In the far corner of the room, Meighan, the detective, knelt upon the floor amidst a scene of grotesque disorder. The door of a very small safe had been "souped," and now sagged open. Books and papers littered the floor, and were strewn over a mattress that, evidently dragged from the inner room, had been swaddled around the safe to deaden the sound of the explosion.

"You don't understand!" Kenleigh burst out, with a groan. "This means absolute ruin to me! A hundred thousand dollars in bonds—payable to bearer—and—and, God help me, they weren't mine!"

"Say"—Meighan, still busily occupied with the fractured safe, spoke gruffly, though not unkindly, over his

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shoulder—"I understand all right, but don't lose your nerve, Mr. Kenleigh. It won't get you anywhere, and it doesn't follow because the swag is gone that we can't get it back. I know the guy that pulled this job."

"You—*what!*" Kenleigh, his face lighting up as though with a sudden hope, stepped quickly toward the detective. "What did you say? You know who did it!"

"Don't get excited!" advised Meighan coolly. "Sure, I know! That is, it's a toss-up between one of two, and that's easy. We'll round 'em both up before morning, and then I guess it won't be much of a trick to pick the winner. They won't be looking for trouble as quick as this. We'll get 'em, all right. It's a toss-up between Mug Garretty and the Magpie."

Kenleigh was staring incredulously at the detective. "How do you know?" he gasped out. "I—I don't——"

"I daresay you don't." Meighan was chuckling now. "It's like this, Mr. Kenleigh. A crook's like any one else, like an artist, say—you get to know 'em, get to spot 'em, especially safe workers, from certain peculiarities about their work. They can't any more help it than stop breathing. Here, for instance, the way he——" Meighan stopped suddenly. He had been pulling the mattress away from the front of the safe, and now, with a sharp, exultant exclamation, he stooped quickly and picked up a small object from the floor. He held it out, twirling it between thumb and forefinger, for Kenleigh's inspection—a flashy scarf pin, horseshoe-shaped, of blatantly imitation diamonds.

Kenleigh shook his head bewilderingly.

"I suppose you mean that you recognise it?" he ventured.

"Recognise it!" Meighan laughed low, and, stepping quickly past Kenleigh to the desk, picked up the telephone, and called Headquarters. "Recognise it!" With

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the receiver to his ear, waiting for his connection, he turned toward Kenleigh. "Why, say, walk over to the Bowery and show it to the first person you meet, and he'd call the turn. Pretty, isn't it? When he's dolled up, he's some—hello!" He swung around to the telephone. "Headquarters? . . . Meighan speaking from Kenleigh's apartment . . . Get a drag out for the Magpie on the jump . . . Eh? . . . Yes! . . . Left his visiting card . . . What? . . . Yes, wound a mattress around the box and souped it; his scarf pin must have caught in the ticking and pulled out. . . . Sure, that's the one—the horseshoe—found it on the floor . . . What? . . . Yes, the chances are ten to one he will, it's his only play . . . All right, I'll get Mr. Kenleigh's story meanwhile . . . I'll be here till you 'phone . . . Yes . . . All right!"

Meighan hung up the receiver, sat down in a chair, and motioned toward another that was close alongside the desk.

"Turn out the light, Mr. Kenleigh," he said abruptly; "and sit down here."

Kenleigh looked his amazement.

"Turn out the light?" he repeated perplexedly.

"Yes," Meighan nodded. "And at once, please."

Obeying mechanically, Kenleigh moved toward the electric-light switch. There was a faint click, and the apartment was in darkness. Came then the sound of Kenleigh making his way back across the room, and settling himself in the chair beside the detective.

"I—I don't quite see," said Kenleigh, a little nervously. "I——"

"You will in a minute," interrupted Meighan, in a low voice. "Don't make any noise now, and don't speak much above a whisper. That little glass stick pin is worth twenty years to the Magpie. See? When he finds that he has lost it, he'll take any risk to make sure that he

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