

**Frank L. Packard**



*Jimmie Dale And  
The Blue Envelope  
Murder*



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Chapter 1 Alias The Gray Seal](#)  
[Chapter 2 The Only Way](#)  
[Chapter 3 The Break](#)  
[Chapter 4 Drawn Blinds](#)  
[Chapter 5 Detective Sergeant Waud](#)  
[Chapter 6 Smarlinghue](#)  
[Chapter 7 Crooks Known Of Old](#)  
[Chapter 8 The Council Ends](#)  
[Chapter 9 Twisty Munn](#)  
[Chapter 10 The Ferret](#)  
[Chapter 11 Frayed Threads](#)  
[Chapter 12 The Second Visitor](#)  
[Chapter 13 The Two Oaks](#)  
[Chapter 14 Men In Masks](#)  
[Chapter 15 Inside Information](#)  
[Chapter 16 Without Rehearsal](#)  
[Chapter 17 At Midnight](#)  
[Chapter 18 The Tocsin's Story](#)  
[Chapter 19 The House Of Mystery](#)  
[Chapter 20 The Two Voices](#)  
[Chapter 21 The Trap](#)  
[Chapter 22 The Final Round](#)  
[THE END](#)



# Chapter 1

## Alias The Gray Seal

### Table of Contents

The lounge windows of the St. James Club, that club of clubs, looked out on Fifth Avenue. Jimmie Dale, ensconced in a deep armchair, turned slightly away from his two companions, and stared out introspectively at the lighted thoroughfare, now comparatively deserted in the late evening hour. He was suddenly conscious that once upon a time he had lived and taken part in the same scene, or one whose similarity was so marked as to make it almost identical, that was being enacted around him now. He had had experiences of this sort before at rare and unexpected intervals—just as most people had, he supposed—but there always seemed to be something portending, something almost eerie and supernatural about such happenings which affected him unpleasantly.

Herman Carruthers, the managing editor of the *Morning News-Argus*, had begun reminiscing about the Gray Seal, and had just made the statement that, since the Gray Seal had not been heard of for so long, the Gray Seal was therefore indubitably dead. It was precisely the same statement Carruthers had made one evening in this same club years ago in the early days of the Gray Seal's career. There had been only two present on that occasion, Carruthers and himself; to-night there was a third, Ray Thorne—and out of Thorne's mouth, startlingly, in instant reply, had come to all intents and purposes the very words that he, Jimmie Dale, had used on that other night.

“Why not give him the benefit of the doubt and say that he has reformed?” Thorne had asked.

Jimmie Dale drew deep on his cigarette. The sequel to that other occasion had been the sudden reappearance of the Gray Seal. And to-night? Ridiculous, of course! Impossible! So far as anybody in this world would ever know, with the one exception of the Tocsin, the Gray Seal *was* dead. Why, then, should there be any sense of portent? To-night was staging a rather curious coincidence, of course—but that was all. He swung around in his chair again with a quizzical smile as Carruthers addressed him:

“What do you say about it, Jimmie?”

“Good Lord,” complained Jimmie Dale whimsically, “how should I know?”

“Well, I’ll tell you then,” reiterated Carruthers stubbornly. “He’s dead!”

Jimmie Dale laughed slyly.

“You know, really, Carruthers, old chap, you rather amuse me. I have just recalled that we were on the same topic here in this same club some years ago and you made the same statement. And you were wrong—oh, quite wrong! If the Gray Seal had ever been dead, he certainly came to life again that night with a wallop!”

“Yes, I was wrong in an actual sense,” Carruthers admitted; “but I was right in another—and that’s why I am so positive that he has now passed on to the great beyond. You will also remember that, at the time, I said he couldn’t stop being a crook—and live? Well, he couldn’t—and didn’t. But that period of inactivity to which we are referring had endured only about a year; whereas now it is quite a

different proposition, so different that I repeat without hesitation that it is a certainty he is dead. You know that since the beginning of the war down to to-night, a year after the war is over, nothing during all that time has ever been heard of him and his filthy, murderous tricks.”

“Filthy, murderous tricks!” Jimmie Dale whistled plaintively. “Oh, Carruthers! What apostasy! It somehow sticks in my memory that you used to call him the most puzzling, bewildering, delightful crook in the annals of crime.”

“So I did,” said Carruthers a little gruffly. “And so he was—up to a certain point in his career. Teasing the public and the police with his diamond-shaped gray-paper seals every time he pulled one of his apparently purposeless breaks, was one thing; but when it came to the brutal and cold-blooded murders that he committed afterward—more than one of them, mind you—that was quite another. It is my firm conviction that if he had ever been caught, the mob would have taken justice into its own hands and torn him to pieces—and he would have deserved it! He became a blood-drunk monster with no single thing to be said in his favor.”

Jimmie Dale chuckled.

“Ingrate!” he murmured accusingly. “Have you forgotten what he was worth to you as front-page copy? Didn’t you tell me once that he used to sell out the whole edition of your beastly sheet every time he broke loose?”

Thorne, joining in the conversation, laughed outright.

“And I guess that’s right, too!” he said. “I wasn’t living in New York then, but if even the papers abroad featured him, I can imagine the gold mine he must have been to the press

here. However, I don't suppose Carruthers has any regrets to-day over the loss of his one-time headliner. Eh, Carruthers—in these piping days of joyous crime? Plenty of stuff, continuous performance—what? How many gang murders on the menu in to-morrow morning's edition?"

"Yes; it's pretty fierce!" Carruthers nodded. "New York is about as safe to-day as a front-line trench was in the war. The days when we ran the Gray Seal in red ink were zephyr-like compared with these—but there was never but one Gray Seal, and there'll never be anything like him again. He'd still own the 'desk.' "

"Which gives me a thought," observed Thorne. "Suppose, granting he's dead, that he got ferried back across the Styx and came to life again here, he'd get an awful jolt, wouldn't he? Crime is Big Business to-day. Things have changed."

Carruthers growled grimly.

"Yes, things have changed with a vengeance," he said; "but I wouldn't care to turn him loose under the *improved* conditions—he'd only have a wider field to work. He'd find the saloons gone, but he'd find thirty-two thousand speakeasies and then some in their place. He probably wouldn't recognize the Bowery. The old deadline that popularly marked the confines of the Bad Lands is no more; to-day the underworld extends from the Bloody Angle in Chinatown up to Harlem, and from the East River to the Hudson—and I'm not saying anything about Brooklyn! The dance halls have become night clubs. The gang leaders have become millionaires. And besides all this, of course, there still remain some of the old dens and dives that he knew so well as Larry the Bat. No, I wouldn't care to see *him*



back again—God knows it’s bad enough as it is! You agree, Jimmie?”

“Heaven forbid!” breathed Jimmie Dale piously.

“Well, that’s that—*requiescat*, you know,” said Thorne with a cheery grin. “And I’ve got to be going! When’s Marie coming back, Jimmie?”

“She’s leaving Paris to-morrow, and sailing from Liverpool on Saturday,” Jimmie Dale answered.

“And the Big Event scarcely a month off!” Thorne’s grin broadened. “Who’s writing your speech for you, Jimmie? Carruthers, the scribe?”

“I am not!” declared Carruthers sternly. “That is always the duty of the best man.”

“Wow!” grimaced Thorne. “I’m sorry I spoke! I leave it to you, Jimmie—that wasn’t specified when I graciously consented to take on the job!” He rose to his feet. “Are you fellows sticking around?”

“No,” said Carruthers; “I’m on my way, too.”

“I’ve got a letter to write,” said Jimmie Dale, “and I might as well do it here. Good-night, you chaps!”

“Good-night,” they answered—and left the room.

Jimmie Dale looked at his watch. Eleven o’clock. He turned and frowned out of the window. Queer business! What the devil had started Carruthers harping on the Gray Seal? It didn’t matter, of course, not in the slightest; but nevertheless he couldn’t get out of his mind the startling analogy between to-night and that night when, after that little affair in Isaac Brotsky’s second-hand store on West Broadway, Carruthers had excitedly telephoned him that the Gray Seal had come to life again. But Carruthers wasn’t

going to telephone any such similar message again to-night, was he? Absurd! A call to arms? One of those old notes again? Still more absurd! Why, Marie, the Tocsin, wasn't even on this side of the water! The Tocsin! Memory flooded back upon him. The night he had found her gold signet ring in the finger of her glove, which latter, in her haste to escape unseen, she had inadvertently dropped in his car! He had not known who she was then, but from that night he had called her the Tocsin because, on examining the ring, the motto in the scroll had seemed so strangely apt: *Sonnez le Tocsin*. Ring the Tocsin! Sound the alarm! He had never, up to that time, received a communication from her that had not sounded a new alarm—that had not been another “call to arms” for the Gray Seal! Singular that all this should come crowding back on him to-night!

Still frowning, he strolled into the writing room and wrote his letter—but it was mechanically written, his mind refusing to concentrate on the matter in hand. Then he left the club—and fifteen minutes later, having ridden uptown on the top of a bus, he was mounting the steps of his home on Riverside Drive.

But halfway up the steps Jimmie Dale stood suddenly still. Intuitively he knew what was coming. The impossible was about to happen. To-night *was* going to duplicate that other night. Faithful old Jason, who always insisted on sitting up for him—and usually went to sleep in the hall chair—wasn't nodding over his self-imposed vigil to-night. Jason already had the door open, and the old man's face in the light from the vestibule lamp was white and strained.

Jimmie Dale took the remaining steps at a bound.

“Yes, Jason?” he asked quickly. “What is it?”

“Master Jim,” quavered the old butler, who had been in the household even before Jimmie Dale was born, “I—I am afraid, sir, it’s one of those—those strange—”

“Letters,” supplied Jimmie Dale, a sudden quiet in his voice. “It’s utterly and wholly impossible, of course—but so none the less, eh? Where is it?”

Jason closed the door, and picking up a silver tray from the hall stand, extended it to his master.

Wonderful fingers were those slim, tapering fingers of Jimmie Dale, and now, as he took a plain, sealed envelope from the tray, their supersensitive tips were telegraphing to his brain the message that the paper was unquestionably of the same texture as of old.

“Who brought this, Jason?” he demanded.

“I don’t know, Master Jim,” Jason answered heavily. “I—I am afraid I was nodding in the chair there, sir, when I became aware that the doorbell was ringing; but when I opened the door nobody was there. There was only that envelope, Master Jim, lying on the doorstep; but the bell was still ringing—you see, sir, whoever it was had wedged a little sliver of wood, a piece of a match, sir, I should say, into the bell-push.”

“How long ago was this?” queried Jimmie Dale tersely.

“Not more than ten minutes ago, sir,” Jason replied. “I at once rang up the club, Master Jim, but you had already left.”

“I see,” said Jimmie Dale slowly; then briskly: “All right, Jason, there’s nothing else you could have done. I’m home now, anyhow, so lock up, will you, and get away to bed? Good-night, Jason!” He turned to go upstairs—only to pause

abruptly and lay his hand in kindly reassurance on the old man's shoulder. Jason was twisting his hands nervously together, and there were sudden tears in the old, dim eyes. "What is it, Jason?" he questioned cheerily.

"Master Jim, sir," said the old man tremulously. "I am afraid—not for myself, sir, but for you, Master Jim, that, as I've taken the liberty of saying many times, I dandled on my knee when you were a baby, and afterwards too, sir, when you were a bit of a lad after your mother died. I was frightened, sir, when I saw that letter on the doorstep. There haven't been any for years now—letters coming in a strange way like this. I never knew what it all meant when they used to come frequently, and it wasn't for me to ask; but, Master Jim, I haven't forgotten the time you took Benson and me enough into your confidence to tell us that the telephone wires were tapped and the house here watched, and that it meant life and death to you, Master Jim, to get away from the house without it being known. And I remember the night, too, sir, when you were shot, and just managed to get home, and pitched to the floor unconscious right where you're standing now, Master Jim."

"Jason," said Jimmie Dale with mock severity, "you go to bed! You are supposed to have forgotten those little episodes—everybody else has long ago. But just to ease your mind, I'll assure you now that in spite of this"—he held up the envelope—"shall we call it ghostly visitation?—nothing such as happened in the past can ever happen again. That is all over with definitely and finally."

"Thank God for that, then!" said the old man fervently. "It's a relief to hear you say so, sir. I'll sleep the sounder for

it.”

“All right,” said Jimmie Dale, “away with you, then! And, Jason—”

“Yes, sir?”

Jimmie Dale’s hand had found the old man’s shoulder again.

“Thank you for what you said. Good-night, Jason.”

“God bless you, Master Jim, sir, good-night,” the old man answered.



# Chapter 2

## The Only Way

### Table of Contents

Jimmie Dale mounted the stairs, opened a door on the first landing, switched on the lights and closed the door behind him. Outwardly calm, his brain was seething. Almost down to the most minute details, to-night was becoming more and more the counterpart of that “other night.” It was here in his “den” even that he had then read the Tocsin’s sudden call to arms which had again set the Gray Seal to work. Everything was the same—except, of course, that the old Crime Club was no more; and that, instead of the Tocsin being a mystery to him any longer, he and Marie were to be married next month after her return from Europe where she now was.

He was quick, decisive now in his movements as he crossed the room and dropped into a chair before the flat-topped rosewood desk; but his brain outraced his physical actions. In Europe? In Paris? The texture of this envelope! Impossible! She couldn’t have got this envelope there. There was no mistake about the texture. There was only one place where she could have got it, and that was where she had procured the same kind of envelopes and paper in the years gone by when she was living under cover in the underworld—somewhere here in New York. She was *here* then, and almost certainly in hiding—and in danger. Danger! It seemed as though the clutch of icy fingers was suddenly upon his heart.

Tight-lipped, his dark eyes narrowed, Jimmie Dale tore open the envelope, and, extracting a letter in the Tocsin's handwriting, began to read:

Dear philanthropic crook:

It seems incredible that I should write those three words. I never thought I should call you that again except in just the same dear intimate way that you still so often call me the Tocsin. But to-night it is in the old way, with all its old meaning, that those words are written, and I am afraid I am going to shock and alarm you with a statement that will seem almost unbelievable. *Ray Thorne's life is in grave danger.*

The story, even what little I know of it, is too long to tell you here, and I would hardly know where to begin anyway. But, at least, and before I say anything further about Ray, I must not let the receipt of one of these old-time letters bring added anxiety to you because of me.

I am supposed by my friends in Paris to have changed my plans slightly and to have gone to England earlier than I had arranged. They believe I am there now, and that I will sail for home as I originally intended on Saturday. I am, however, as I am sure you have already surmised, in New York at the present moment. But not as Marie LaSalle, for—but, oh, if I start to explain, I shall never end, and you would be little the wiser, for I myself do not know just what it all means, except that there is some miserable and cowardly criminal work afoot, the scene of which has recently shifted from Paris to New York. I know just enough to make me feel absolutely confident that in three or four days—and Jimmie, you must not shake your head and frown so, for I am not

going to be in the slightest danger—that in three or four days I will be able to verify certain suspicions which will enable me to supply the police with enough information to put an end to the whole affair. By the time the ship on which I am supposed to be sailing arrives, everything will be all over, you can meet me at the pier as though I really *had* just arrived, and no one will ever know the difference.

But meanwhile, as I have said, I could not act as Marie LaSalle, for, besides the necessity of remaining unknown for my own sake, I dared not, as the fiancée of Ray Thorne's closest friend, risk the remotest chance of Marie LaSalle being suspected of knowing anything, for then you too would naturally be suspected as well, and would be in equal peril.

I know you do not understand. How could you? I understand so little myself! But when you meet me at the pier next week I will be able to tell you everything.

And now, Jimmie, I come to to-night. Enclosed in a letter, Ray received a plain, blue envelope to-day, and at the present moment that blue envelope is in his safe at his home. I do not know what the envelope contains. I do not know how Ray ever came to be involved in this affair or what his connection with it is, but I do know that so long as he is in possession of the blue envelope he is in constant danger of his life. He would not give it up of his own accord—therefore it must be *stolen* from him. But it must be stolen in such a way that the theft not only becomes quickly and widely known, but, above all, in such a way that there could be no question that it was anything other than a *bona-fide* theft; so that, in other words, it will be instantly apparent,

even to those concerned in the affair, that Ray has not so much as a suspicion of the “thief’s” identity, and hence is obviously ignorant of what has become of the blue envelope itself. In that way he is safe. Otherwise it might be construed as a theft engineered by himself, a trick on Ray’s own part—and that would only hasten his death. And there is only one way to accomplish this end, isn’t there, Jimmie? You understand what I mean. I know that this will create a furor; I know what the result will be; I know that every newspaper in New York will flare with vicious headlines—but it is that very furor which will stamp the theft as genuine, and it is the only way I know to save Ray. You will do it, of course; I am sure that long before you have read this far your mind has already been made up—but you must act at once, tonight, Jimmie. And when you have secured the blue envelope, oh, be very sure, be very careful that it does not under any circumstances pass out of your hands until you have heard from me.

That is everything, Jimmie—except all, *all* my love.

THE TOCSIN.

P. S. Oh, I want to see you so much, Jimmie—and I will in a few days now. And then, just think of it, Jimmie, our wedding is next month! M.

Jimmie Dale read the letter over again; then, rising from his chair, began to pace up and down the length of that rather unique but luxuriously furnished den of his, which, with its matched panels, its cozy fireplace, its queer little curtained alcove, ran the entire depth of the house. His footsteps made no sound on the rich velvet rug, and, as he walked, the old habit mechanically asserting itself, he began

to tear the letter into fragments, and the fragments into smaller pieces.

Confusion, perplexity, and anxiety were in his mind; the past, the years that were gone, came crowding upon him with their myriad memories. The Call to Arms again! Another “crime” for the Gray Seal to commit! Crime! Not one in the decalogue but was already charged to the Gray Seal. Crime! Where there had been no crime! And he had thought those days were over forever. But that was what she meant by “the only way.” She was right, of course. No one would ever for an instant imagine that it was anything but a *bona-fide* theft if the Gray Seal committed it. Ray’s life! Ray—who was to be his best man! She never wrote idle words. Obviously he would go.

He paced up and down, tearing the paper into bits.

That old slogan of police and underworld alike was suddenly ringing in his ears once more to-night: “Death to the Gray Seal!” He could already see to-morrow’s papers—the virulent diatribes, the hectic denunciations. Anathema! He could hear the blasphemous whispers of the underworld. He could see the furtive looks, the glances cast askance at one another by those who lived outside the law and preyed upon society. Who was the Gray Seal? Larry the Bat! Yes, they knew that—but they had never been able to find Larry the Bat since the day when the old Sanctuary had burned down, and when like ravening wolves they had watched the fire and howled for the Gray Seal’s death. Under what other guise had Larry the Bat hidden himself? Who was the traitor amongst them? Whose turn would it be next to make,



through the instrumentality of the Gray Seal, a trip to the Big House—and perhaps to the chair?

Fury on the part of the police and populace—fear-goaded fury on the part of the underworld!

The past was back again—to be lived again, to be reenacted. If he were ever caught! A murderous roar of voices hoarse with blood lust was in his ears. Headlines blazed before his eyes:

CRIME MONSTER CAUGHT AT LAST

MILLIONAIRE CLUBMAN  
LEADS DOUBLE LIFE

JIMMIE DALE UNMASKED AS THE  
GRAY SEAL

He passed his hand across his eyes. This sudden resurrection of the buried past, this change in the twinkling of an eye from the security of years to the ever-present menace of exposure again had left him a little jumpy, hadn't it? Well, why shouldn't it? He was no superman.

What time was it? He glanced at his watch. Not quite midnight. Too early yet to go to Ray's. Jason would hardly have got to bed; and Ray's household would not likely have settled down for the night.

Halting abruptly he placed the shreds of paper in the fireplace, touched a match to them, and watched them burn—and was immediately conscious that this, too, was precisely what he had done on that "other night." He forced a short laugh. It *was* a bit eerie—and almost as though it actually *were* that "other night." And presently there would

be other little things he already knew he was going to do which would strengthen that illusion. Well, did it make any difference? Let it carry through that way. If there was any significance attached to these constant little reminders, it was at least one of good omen. On that "other night" there had been two fellow humans who had been the happier for the Gray Seal's call to arms, and to-night—there was Ray!

He flung himself into a chair and lighted a cigarette. How had Marie become mixed up in the affair, the aspects of which, to say the least, were obviously sinister in the extreme? He did not know, of course—nor could he even guess. He could, on the other hand, perfectly understand that she would act exactly as she had done, for it was the way that, as "Silver Mag" and "Mother Margot," she had acted in the years gone by—but that only served to put a still more serious complexion on the whole matter. She was living under cover, playing some rôle, her identity hidden; and, in spite of her light words and the statement that it was merely a question of a few days, she certainly would not have gone to any such extreme had she not realized that every move she made would involve great danger. And, too, she was trying to protect *him*, Jimmie Dale—as she had so often done in the past. She had admitted that in her letter.

Jimmie Dale's lips firmed. Anxiety was growing upon him. Her danger was so great that she would not share it with him! Bluntly, that was what it meant.

He sank his chin in his hands. His mind went back over the years. Her love, her courage, her marvelous resourcefulness, her steadfastness, her sacrifice. And then, with the Crime Club destroyed and her normal life restored

to her, they were to have been married—but the war had intervened. They had both gone. That had been like her. That was just what she would do, and nothing would have deterred her. She could not have been herself and have done anything else. She had gone as a nurse. Wisely or unwisely, selfishly or unselfishly, they had both agreed to postpone their marriage until after the war was over.

He wished now with all his soul they had not done so, for then she would not have made this recent trip alone to Paris to visit some of her wartime friends, and incidentally, womanlike, to buy her trousseau. He shook his head suddenly. He did not quite mean that, did he? She would in those circumstances never have been in a position to write that letter, which obviously had its genesis in something that had happened in Paris—and if she had not written it, what then of Ray? She would never have known that Ray's life was threatened, and the result would probably have been Ray's death.

Jimmie Dale's dark eyes traveled unseeingly around the room. Fate indulged in strange vagaries, didn't it? And Ray! The same question in respect of Ray that he could neither answer nor guess at! How had Ray become involved in any such affair as this? She had said she did not know—and he, Jimmie Dale, certainly had no clue to the key of it.

He had come to know Ray in the war, and they had grown close to each other—as those men do who have linked arms together with death, not once but often; as men do when one, sore wounded himself, has crawled, dragging the other, worse wounded still, over bullet-sprayed terrain—

to safety and life. One man's love for another—that was what Ray meant to him.

And yet he did not *know* Ray. There were things in Ray's life that Ray had, as it were, sidetracked, that were locked up within the man himself—a sort of closed book. He, Jimmie Dale, had sensed that; and, naturally, had never attempted to intrude or question where confidences were not volunteered. He knew that from childhood Ray had traveled far and wide, and had lived long in strange, out-of-the-way places. He knew practically nothing of Ray's family, except that Ray had a brother living in Sydney, Australia. He did know that Ray was a bachelor, and obviously a man of independent means.

More or less unsatisfactory in view of that letter! It left the field of supposition wide open. It was not at all improbable that out of Ray's wandering past had been laid the foundation of this present murderous attitude toward him. Not that Ray was in any way culpable—he would not believe that. Ray was too clean, too much the man, too much the straightforward, open-minded gentleman for that.

To dispossess Ray of that blue envelope! And merely by so doing to render Ray immune from all personal danger! That in itself was queer—very queer indeed. It invited so many questions. Who had brought or sent Ray that envelope? Through what single act, or through what chain of circumstances, had Ray become the necessary or logical recipient of it, and yet at the same time would have no further connection with it from the standpoint of the past if it were taken away from him?—and this in spite of the fact that the envelope contained something of so much value to

someone that murder would unhesitatingly be resorted to, if necessary, to obtain it! The pieces did not fit! What did it mean?

Jimmie Dale sat almost immovable in his chair, lost to his surroundings, his mind groping and probing for some explanation of this cataclysmic situation that was now, suddenly and without warning, thrusting upon him the old dual life again. The quarters and the half-hours passed. When he looked at his watch again, it was after one o'clock. He shrugged his shoulders philosophically. His mental delvings had got him nowhere. But, after all, for the moment, that was not essential. He had been asked to do only one thing.

It was time to go.



# Chapter 3

## The Break

### [Table of Contents](#)

He rose from his chair, crossed the room, and, drawing aside the portière that hung before the alcove, disclosed the squat, barrel-shaped safe that he had designed himself in the days when he had been associated in business with his father—who had owned and operated one of the largest safe manufacturing plants in the United States until just prior to his death, when he had sold out to a combine. His fingers played for a moment deftly over the several knobs and dials that confronted him—and the door swung open. An inner door, no less complicated in its mechanism, followed suit. And then, from a secret compartment within, Jimmie Dale took out what looked like a little bundle of leather that was rolled up and tied with thongs; then he closed and locked the doors of the safe, and carried the bundle over to the desk. Here he unrolled it, laying it out at full length—and stood for a moment regarding it while a grim smile gathered in his eyes and played around his lips. It was the belt with its stout-sewn upright pockets containing those blued-steel, finely tempered tools, that compact, powerful burglar's kit, which had stood him so often in good stead in the days gone by—and which, until scarcely more than an hour ago, he had never dreamed he would use again.

He began to examine the tools critically, taking them one by one from their respective pockets, and, as he replaced them, nodded his head in approval of the condition in which

he found them. There remained two pockets still uninspected. From one he took out a black silk mask, and from the other a thin, flat metal case much like a cigarette case. The mask after inspection went back into its pocket, and then he opened the metal case. On the top reposed a tiny pair of tweezers; and beneath, between sheets of oil-paper, lay row upon row of gray, diamond-shaped, adhesive-paper seals.

And now a minute passed, and still another, as Jimmie Dale stood there with the metal case still open in his hand while he stared at the little gray seals within—and the years seemed suddenly to come rushing back upon him out of the past. It had been in the spirit of fun and adventure that he had originally pitted his brains against the police, but in order that no one else by mischance should suffer or be accused of the apparent “crimes” he committed, he had adopted these gray paper seals as his insignia—and had thus launched the Gray Seal on his career. And he had gone unknown and unsuspected until that night when, having opened a safe in a jewelry establishment in Maiden Lane, he had just barely managed to make his escape from the police—and the next morning had received a letter in a woman’s handwriting informing him that *she* knew who had opened Marx’s safe even if the police did not. The letter had taken the form of an ultimatum. He could choose between her and the police. Thereafter she would plan the coups and the Gray Seal would execute them, or else Jimmie Dale would be exposed. He was to answer “yes” or “no” through the personal column of the *News-Argus*. He had had no choice. He had answered “yes”—but with the mental reservation

that he would always in some way speciously manage to render abortive, rather than perpetrate, any crime in which she endeavored to make him an accomplice. How little he had known! How little need there had been for any mental reservation of that sort! There was many a man and many a woman to-day who was the happier because of the “crimes” that she, as the Tocsin, or Silver Mag, or Mother Margot, and he, as the Gray Seal, or Larry the Bat, or Smarlinghue, had committed—and no man or woman who had suffered save those who had outraged the law and had richly merited their punishment.

And he had thought those days over forever!

He closed the metal case abruptly, returned it to its pocket, and, taking off his coat and vest, put on the belt, making use of the thongs as shoulder straps. Then he got into his coat and vest again; but now his eyes were suddenly wistful. Where was the Tocsin to-night? Here in New York—yes! But where? *Was* she safe? Was this really to be like those other days, or would to-night, if he were successful in the task she had set him, bring the end in sight as she believed?

Who knew? Jimmie Dale shook his head. Speculation would get him nowhere. It was a question of action now. From a drawer in his desk he transferred to his pockets a flashlight and an automatic; then, switching off the light, he left the room, descended the stairs—and the front door closed noiselessly behind him.

At that hour in the morning the streets in his neighborhood were empty and deserted. Jimmie Dale walked swiftly, and some fifteen minutes later, no more than

a blotch in the darkness, he was crouched beneath the stoop at the basement entrance of Ray Thorne's home.

And now the Gray Seal was at work. From a pocket in the belt around his waist he took out and slipped over his face his black silk mask; while from another pocket came a delicate little steel instrument which he inserted in the doorlock.

But for once the Gray Seal's deft sureness seemed to have deserted him. A minute passed, perhaps two—fruitlessly.

"I am afraid I am a little out of practice," explained Jimmie Dale to himself whimsically, "and—ah, that's better!"

The door opened and shut behind him—without a sound. For a moment he stood listening; and then, with that tread of almost uncanny silence acquired through long practice as a defense against the rickety stairs of the old Sanctuary, he stepped swiftly forward. It was inky black, but he had no need of light, and his flashlight for the moment was an unnecessary risk. He knew Ray Thorne's home almost as well as he knew his own. He moved unerringly.

The safe was in a small room on the first floor off the living room that Ray called his sanctum. Jimmie Dale made his way through the silent house to the room he sought, and dropped upon his knees in front of the safe.

And then for the first time the round, white ray of his flashlight cut through the darkness, playing long and inquisitively on the polished nickel dial that glistened responsively now in front of him.

And under the mask Jimmie Dale's brows grew wrinkled.

He had never paid any particular attention to Ray's safe before; but having designed and built so many himself, Jimmie Dale knew safes as few men knew them, and what he saw now he did not like. It would take all he knew, take all that was in him, to open this one; and besides, as he had said a few minutes ago, he was out of practice.

"But anyway," he muttered optimistically, "it's a type that hasn't got an inner door."

The light went out.

Jimmie Dale's ear was pressed against the face of the safe; the slim sensitive fingers, that in their tips seemed to embody all the human senses, crept to the dial knob.

A long time passed with no sound at first save a faint musical tinkle as the dial whirled. And then there came another sound—the sound of labored breathing, of a man panting almost, as though in distress.

Beneath the mask the sweat was pouring now down Jimmie Dale's face. Again and again he frictioned his moist finger tips on the rug upon which he knelt; again and again he returned to the attack, giving, as he had known he would have to give, all that was in him to the task.

And then suddenly Jimmie Dale whispered out into the darkness.

"Thank God!" he breathed fervently.

The safe stood open.

The flashlight's ray bored into the interior. The safe contained what appeared to be a number of account books, and an innumerable number of documents and papers. He began to remove these from the safe and toss them quite callously on the floor around him. Why not? A thief would

have little regard for another's property, and less for what did not interest the thief himself!

Jimmie Dale's lips twitched in grim humor. The blue envelope was all the time in that little locked drawer, of course. But one must do one's job as artistically as one could!

A blued-steel instrument was at work. A ratchet gnawed. The drawer came open—and the blue envelope lay in Jimmie Dale's hand. He examined it curiously under the flashlight's ray. It was just slightly larger than the ordinary size of commercial envelope; and was so far from being bulky that one might almost imagine that it contained nothing at all. It was sealed and bore neither address nor mark of any kind upon it.

With a noncommittal shrug of his shoulders Jimmie Dale placed the envelope in his inside coat pocket, and from his belt took out the thin metal case. Propping the flashlight against the edge of the safe, he opened the case, and with the tweezers lifted out one of the diamond-shaped gray paper seals. He moistened the adhesive side of this with his tongue, took his handkerchief from his pocket, placed the gray seal upon it—and pressed it against the face of the safe. Headquarters had yet to discover the trace of a fingerprint on the insignia of the Gray Seal! Or anywhere else for that matter!

He wiped the dial and knob of the safe carefully with his handkerchief, picked up the flashlight, stood for a moment surveying his handiwork critically—then the room was in darkness, and, as silently as he had entered, Jimmie Dale left the house.

As he reëntered his own house, he consulted his watch. It was twenty minutes after two. He smiled a little cryptically as he mounted the staircase, entered his den, and, divesting himself of his belt, rolled it up and locked it away with the blue envelope in his safe. This new début of the Gray Seal had been without any misadventure and had taken approximately only an hour and twenty minutes—but what of the afterwards? The repercussion was still to come! Tomorrow's papers!

He crossed the hall, entered his dressing room, began to remove his clothes—and suddenly, as his eyes lighted on the telephone on the table, a sense of the analogy between this night and that “other night” which had once in the long ago witnessed the reappearance of the Gray Seal intruded itself forcibly again upon him. So far, in detail after detail, to-night had run true to form. All that was needed to put the finishing touch upon it was to have Carruthers call up at some such ungodly hour as this and bombshell his news about the Gray Seal's return!

Jimmie Dale shook his head as he got into bed. Even to contemplate such a possibility was to verge on the fantastic! He certainly need have no fear that his slumbers would be disturbed, for on this occasion he had had no run-in with the police to bring the consequent inevitable newspaper man immediately on the job; so, until Ray's household awoke in the morning, nothing obviously would be known about the “break.”

For a time Jimmie Dale lay staring into the darkness, his mind too active to permit of sleep—anxiety on the Tocsin's account, this unexplained connection of Ray with the affair,