

**Frank L. Packard**



*Jimmie Dale and  
the Phantom Clue*

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[goodpress@okpublishing.info](mailto:goodpress@okpublishing.info)

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# Chapter 1

## The Tocsin

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The boat drifted on. In the distance a ferry churned its way across the river. From the farther shore the myriad lights of Brooklyn flung a soft glow into the sky, like a canopy between the city and the night.

And in the boat two figures merged as one in the darkness.

“Marie!” Jimmie Dale whispered. His arms tightened about her. “Marie!”

She made answer by a little pressure of her hand.

He looked behind him—in toward the nearer shore. Somewhere back there, somewhere amongst those irregular outlines that thrust out points of deeper darkness into the black, mirror-like surface of the water, was the old pier from beneath which they had escaped, and, above the pier, the shed where but a little while ago—or was it hours, or a lifetime ago?—Clarke, alias Wizard Marre, alias Hunchback Joe, had played his last card, and lost.

A grim smile touched Jimmie Dale’s lips. Inside that shed the secret service men had found their quarry—dead. They were there now. In their hands lay the evidence that solved the murder of Jathan Lane; and in their hands, too, was the murderer himself—only Wizard Marre had taken the easier way, and was dead.

Jimmie Dale’s smile softened. Inside that shed at the present moment there was commotion enough and light enough; but he could hear nothing, and he could see no



light. The Tocsin here and himself were too far away. Too far away! Yes, that was it—at last! Too far away from the old life—forever. The road of fear lay behind them, and she was free, free to come out into the sunlight again. She had said so herself in that letter he had read at the club only a few hours ago. Free! Life lay before them now—and love. With the death of Wizard Marre there could now be an end of his, Jimmie Dale's, own rôles of the Gray Seal, and Larry the Bat, and Smarlinghue, and—no, not hers as the Tocsin, that could never change or terminate, for she would always be the Tocsin to him.

The Tocsin! Memory came surging upon him. That night in the long ago, before he had ever seen her, when he had known her only as the woman who addressed him as “Dear Philanthropic Crook” in those mysterious notes of hers that, supplying the data on which he had acted, the data for those “crimes,” where no crime save that of rendering abortive the crimes of others had ever been, had made the name of the Gray Seal anathema to police and underworld alike; that night when, besides a note, he had also found a gold seal ring of hers, a dainty thing that bore a crest, a bell surmounted by a bishop's mitre, and underneath, in the scroll, a motto in French: *Sonnez le Tocsin!* It had seemed so apt! Ring the Tocsin! Sound the alarm! Always her notes had done that—calling the Gray Seal to arms that some one else might be the better or the happier for what she bade him do. The Tocsin! The word had seemed to visualise her then, and, knowing her by no other name, he had called her—the Tocsin.

She stirred a little in his arms.

“What time is it, Jimmie?” she asked.

He shook his head. Time! What did time matter now? To Marie LaSalle, who once had lived in hourly peril of her life as Silver Mag in the days of the old Crime Club, and later, yes even until to-night, had again been forced to live under cover of some rôle which she had never divulged to him and which he had never penetrated; and to him, Jimmie Dale, in whose ears need never sound again that slogan of the underworld, “Death to the Gray Seal!” that reached to every nook and corner of the Bad Lands—to her and to him what did time count for now, save as a great, illimitable mine of happiness, a wealth beyond all telling that they were to spend *together!*

She spoke again:

“What time is it, Jimmie?”

And now he answered her.

“I don’t know,” he said happily. “It was just midnight when the shed back there was raided. Since then there hasn’t been any such thing as time, Marie.”

“Listen!” she said.

From somewhere across the water, faintly, a tower clock struck the hour.

“One o’clock!” she exclaimed, as though in dismay. “We must be getting ashore. I—I did not think it was so late. And please, Jimmie, I’d like to row the boat. I—I feel quite—quite cold.”

He felt her shiver a little in his arms.

“Cold!” he echoed anxiously; and then, as he released her: “All right, if you really want to. It isn’t very far. And I



guess it's safe now. Pull in and skirt along the shore until we can find some good place to land."

She nodded as she picked up the oars, then turned the boat's head in toward the shore and began to row.

Jimmie Dale moved back into the stern of the boat and settled himself in his seat. He watched her, drinking in the lithe, graceful swing of her body, the rhythmic stroke of the heavy oars. He could not see her face for the night shadows hid it, but he could see the poise of her head and the contour of the full, perfect throat. And he clasped his hand behind his head, and a great happiness and a great peace fell upon him.

It seemed somehow as though the voyage of this little boat in which they had fled out here into the night for safety epitomised a voyage of great immensity that had begun in the very long ago, a voyage of interminable night through which his eyes had been straining and his soul had been yearning for a glimpse of the beacon light that should signal the approach to a wondrous Port of Dawn. And now the voyage was almost at an end. Marie there at the oars, and the peace and quiet around them, was the beacon light at last; and they could no more lose their way because the way was charted now to that Port of Dawn where there was no more any strife and peril and sordid crime, and where only love was.

He smiled at his fancy, and suddenly laughed out into the night.

"Keep in a little to the right, Marie," he called. "There's something that looks like a low wharf ahead that ought to do."

“Yes; I see it,” she answered.

Jimmie Dale sat abruptly upright in his seat. Perhaps it was only the rasp and creak of the oars in the rowlocks, but it had sounded so *human*—like a short, quick, suppressed sob. He leaned forward.

“Was that you, Marie?” he asked quickly. “What is it?”

He could not see her face. Her voice came back to him steady and untroubled:

“Nothing, Jimmie.”

Across the night, far up above them and in the distance, a great bridge stretched from shore to shore, its arc of sparkling lights like a tiara crowning the brow of the heavens. Faintly there came the roar of traffic, ever restless, ever sleepless. A trolley clanged its way unseen somewhere near the shore which the boat was now rapidly approaching; and here, where the lights showed but sparsely, many buildings, small and large, loomed out in queer, grotesque and fanciful shapes.

Jimmie Dale’s dark eyes lighted. All this was as it always was and always had been—only it was *changed*. It held a promise now that it had never held before. He felt his pulse beat quicken.

The Port of Dawn!

“Here we are, Marie!” he cried.

The bow of the boat touched the edge of a low wharf—and then Jimmie Dale, like a man stunned, bewildered, his mind and brain in turmoil and riot, was standing up in the stern of the boat. Quick, like a flash, the Tocsin had lifted the oars from the rowlocks, flung them away in the water, and,

springing to the string-piece of the wharf, had pushed the boat out again.

“Jimmie! Oh, Jimmie!” Her voice reached him in a low, broken sob. “There was no other way. It’s in your pocket, Jimmie. I put it there when—when you were—were holding me.”

“Marie!” he cried out wildly. “In God’s name, what are you doing, Marie!” He flung himself upon his knees and began to paddle furiously with his hands. “Marie!” he cried again.

A shadow flitted swiftly along the wharf shorewards; it grew filmy and mingled with a thousand other shadows—and was lost.

She was gone! The Tocsin was gone—as she had gone so many times before. He paddled on with his hands, but the act was purely mechanical. Gone! A cold chill was at his heart; an agony of fear seized upon him. Gone—when life in all its fulness....Gone! Why? An abyss seemed to yawn before him.

After a time the boat bumped against the wharf. He sprang out and ran madly to the shore. He found himself groping like a blind man amongst buildings, in alleys, along dimly lighted streets. And then suddenly he stood still with the consciousness of stark futility upon him. Had he learned no lesson from the past? It was useless to search for her. He might have known that from the first! He *had* known it, only—only things had seemed so *changed* to-night.

Fear took its toll of him again. It brought the sweat beads out upon his forehead. *Fear for her*. Subconsciously he realised now that something, somewhere, had, after all,

gone wrong to-night; that she was still in danger, a danger that she still meant he should not share. No other reason save that brave, unselfish love of hers would have prompted her to this.

“It’s in your pocket, Jimmie.” Her words came back to him.

He searched quickly, and with a sharp little cry of pain drew out a sealed envelope. Under a street lamp in a deserted street, he tore it open. Words that he had never thought to see again danced unsteadily before his eyes.

“Dear Philanthropic Crook—since you *must* be that again,” he read. “I do not know under what circumstances you will receive this. I only know that before the night is over I shall be with you, and we will be together—for a little while. And, Jimmie, I am writing this instead of telling you what I must say, because I am afraid of myself and our love, afraid that I would not be strong enough to hold out against the plea of our hearts that at all costs we should remain together, and against your arguments, and perhaps against your physical restraint—for you *are* masterful, Jimmie. I cannot bring you any more into the shadows in which I know now I must live again. I must not, Jimmie; for it might only too well mean your certain destruction, the certain revelation to both the police and the underworld that the Gray Seal and Larry the Bat and Smarlinghue are none other than Jimmie Dale, the Riverside Drive millionaire and clubman. You see, I am writing without reserve, putting upon paper what has never been put upon paper before, because I know that in some way I shall personally place

this letter in your possession, and that no other hands shall touch it and no other eyes shall see it save yours and mine.

“I am writing this half an hour before midnight, while I am waiting for midnight to come with its disclosure at the old junk-shop on the East River that Hunchback Joe is Wizard Marre—and Clarke. And only a day or so ago, Jimmie, I wrote you another letter telling you that once Clarke was in the hands of the police I would be safe for always. And Clarke *will* be caught to-night, and you will believe that a new world stretches before us, and that all our hopes and aspirations are to come true at last, and you will be happier perhaps in that moment than you have ever been before. Oh, Jimmie, it is so hard even to *write* this, for I love you so; but it is because I do love you with all my heart and soul and life that I will not, shall not, must not let a breath of suspicion exist that there is anything between Marie LaSalle and Jimmie Dale. God keep and guard you! I shall pray always and always for that. And some day, some time perhaps—no, not perhaps, but surely, surely....

“Jimmie, I did not mean to write like this. Listen! You know, through the letter to which I referred above, why during all these past months I have ‘disappeared.’ You know that I was the *only* one who could identify Clarke as one of the leaders of the old Crime Club, and that it was a question of my life or his. You know that he went into hiding, and that there followed attempt after attempt upon my life. And then I ‘left the city for an extended trip,’ as my bankers informed you. And while you sought to find me, which, for the same reasons that still exist to-night, I could not let you do, I fought Clarke under cover with his own weapons. A few days

ago I believed I had won; it seemed only a question of hours. I had placed Clarke in his true person as Marre, the shyster lawyer, and in his other alias as Hunchback Joe. And then suddenly, as though he had never existed, I lost him.

“You now know why. He and some of his band were at work under the bank making that opening into the president’s private office that resulted this afternoon in the murder of Jathan Lane. I was too late to prevent that, but almost immediately afterwards I picked up Clarke’s trail again. I found out that in some way, to cover their own tracks, to end all investigation, false evidence was somehow to be planted, and that to bear this out another murder was to be added to that of the bank president. Jimmie, what could I do? I could not stand passively aside, even when by so doing my own victory was assured. I had to go on. It was to save a man’s life. There was a way to get the information necessary to forestall them, though it involved a risk that I would otherwise never have taken. In a measure I succeeded; I learned how the papers and money, and the black-jack with which the murder was committed, were to be placed in Klanner’s, the bank janitor’s, trunk in his boarding house, and that the man was to be lured into Baldy Jack’s dance hall, where, in a riot staged for the occasion, their victim, apparently an innocent bystander, but with his reputation further blasted by being found in that unsavory resort, was to be shot. A dead man could refute no false evidence! I managed to get word to you, and, thank God, in time. But I was caught—and in my own character of Marie LaSalle. I was carried to one of Clarke’s lairs, and left there a

prisoner. They meant to finish me when the rest of the night's work was over.

“But I must hurry on, Jimmie. It is getting late.

“As I shall have been with you for a little while before you will have read this, you will know of course that I escaped. I have no time now to tell you how. The details do not matter. What matters is this: That while, before, Clarke was the only one who had any concern in putting me out of the way, and that for his own personal safety, that enmity is now transferred to an even more formidable enemy—those, and particularly one, who during the last year have been associated with Clarke. They will be actuated by two motives. First, revenge for the trap that will place Clarke in the hands of the police for the murder of Jathan Lane, and revenge for my interference in their attempt upon Klanner; and, second, the fear—a much more potent motive—that I know far more about them and who they are than I really do, the fear that I am in possession of all the knowledge needed to place them too behind the bars of the death house in Sing Sing. I do not know them, Jimmie—except one man, and that man I am not sure of at all. He is a bigger, brainier, far more crafty man than ever Clarke was, and far more powerful. There are times when I think I know him, and times when I am equally sure that I do not. I have come to call him the Phantom. If I am right, he has a score of aliases, a score of domiciles, and possesses the facility of appearing convincingly in each one of a bewildering number of different characters. I said that they had caught me in my own person. I do not need to tell you now, Jimmie, that if I



were to go back to New York and resume my life as Marie LaSalle it would but be going to certain death.

“Just one thing more. I do not believe that the bank’s papers, valuable as they were, that they took from Jathan Lane in his office, were the sole motive for his murder; indeed, I am not sure that they were the *real* motive. I do not know, of course. But I overheard snatches of something about a safe at Jathan Lane’s house to-night at two o’clock, something that was to have its fulfilment later in a rendezvous at half-past three with an old acquaintance of yours, one Gentleman Laroque. I may be quite wrong; it may be that, even if I am right, my escape and Clarke’s capture would effectually put a stop to anything further they might have schemed to do; but if there *is* anything in it, and if they go on, there will be others at Gentleman Laroque’s who are not expected—the police. I will see to that. And so, perhaps, Jimmie, even to-night, after all, something may happen that will point the way to this Phantom and those with him—and to happiness for us.

“And now you must not be too anxious, Jimmie. In a measure I am safe. They have never penetrated the rôle which I have been playing, and I do not think they ever will. And you are going to help me, too, Jimmie, whenever—oh, Jimmie, those old days!—whenever I can ‘sound the Tocsin’ without allying you with me in the eyes of those upon whom Clarke’s mantle has fallen.”

Jimmie Dale raised haggard eyes. The signature seemed somehow blurred. “Marie...Marie...!”

# Chapter 2

## The Gray Seal

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For a time Jimmie Dale stood motionless under the light, then he started automatically on along the street. He tore the letter into small fragments and the fragments into tiny shreds as he went along. The world seemed a void. No, not that! It was more as though fate jeered at him ironically. He was exactly, in respect of the Tocsin and in respect of the fulfilment of his hopes and plans, where he had been yesterday and a thousand yesterdays ago.

He walked on. The tiny shreds of paper, a few at a time, fluttered from his fingers and were lost. Mechanically he found himself boarding a street car. Thereafter he sat, his strong jaw clamped and hard, staring out through the window.

Who was the Phantom?

Twice, at long intervals, he changed cars. Finally, far uptown, he alighted, and, traversing several blocks, paused in front of a large corner house in a most select and exclusive neighbourhood. Ostensibly, had any one been observing his movements, he had paused in order that, under the street lamp, he might consult his watch. It was a quarter of two. A smile, half grim, half whimsical, as though he were suddenly aroused from some deep reverie to actual physical reality, flickered across his lips. The house on the corner was the residence of Jathan Lane, the bank president, who had been murdered that afternoon.

Jimmie Dale replaced his watch, and nonchalantly turned the corner; but the dark, steady eyes were alight now, sweeping the side street in every direction. His glance detected and held for a bare instant on the black mouth of a lane that showed at the rear of Jathan Lane's house. Jimmie Dale edged toward the inner side of the pavement, still walking nonchalantly. And then, gradually merging more and more with the shadow of the house itself, he came abreast of the lane—and the street was empty. A moment more, and lithe, active, silent as a cat in his movements, he had swung himself over a fence; still another moment, and lost utterly in the shadows of the porch, he was crouching at the basement door of the house.

It was Jimmie Dale, the Gray Seal again, in action now. From under his vest, from one of the multitudinous little upright pockets of that leather girdle where nestled an array of vicious blued-steel implements, a compact burglar's kit, he selected a pick-lock. From another pocket came a black silk mask. Jimmie Dale slipped the mask over his face, and leaned closer to the door. For perhaps five seconds the slim, sensitive fingers were at work, then the door opened noiselessly, and closed again, and was locked behind him.

He stood silent, motionless—listening. There was no sound. Apart from the staff, there should be no one in the house. The papers had overlooked few details in their account of the murder that afternoon. Mrs. Lane was away in Europe, and they had taken the body of Jathan Lane to the house of his married daughter. Under the mask there came again that grim flicker to Jimmie Dale's lips. There

were only the servants then—since it was not yet *two o'clock!*

The round, white ray of a flashlight stabbed through the blackness, vanished, and blackness fell again.

“Stairs ahead and to the right,” Jimmie Dale confided to himself. “Servants’ quarters on top floor probably; only the cellar and storage here.”

The flashlight played steadily, impudently now, pointing the way upstairs; and, as silent as the ray itself, Jimmie Dale followed. As he reached the head of the stairs he found a closed door before him. The light went out. He listened again; then, in the darkness, he opened the door and stepped through. Again he listened. Still there was no sound. The flashlight winked once inquisitively—then darkness again. He was standing at the rear of the hall. The basement stairs came up under what was evidently the main staircase.

And now a shadow flitted with incredible swiftness here and there; and doors opened, and some were closed again, and some were left open—and there was no sound. And presently Jimmie Dale stood again at the rear of the hall. He could command the open door that led to the basement stairs; and along the hall, where a slight rift in the blackness made by the plate glass panels was distinguishable, he could command the front doors.

He nodded in quiet satisfaction to himself. Jathan Lane’s safe was in a sort of private den or office that opened off the rear of the library, and portières hung between the two rooms; each room had a door opening off the hall, and both

doors stood open now. A clock struck somewhere in the house. His lips tightened. It was two o'clock.

Alert, tense, he listened—listened until the silence itself throbbed and beat at the ear drums, and palpitated, and made noises of its own.

There wasn't much chance. He knew that. After what had happened that night, unless under extraordinary conditions, Jathan Lane's safe should be the most inviolate piece of property to be found anywhere in New York. And even if any one came, the corollary of whatever held its premise in that safe was to be found at Gentleman Laroque's, and the Tocsin had said that the police would be warned in time. Yes, he understood. She had obviously made no effort to render anything abortive here at the source, for the very reason that she hoped it would but lead to the trap she would have prepared at Gentleman Laroque's. Her attitude had been quite logical, quite plausible. So why was *he* here?

Jimmie Dale's hands clenched at his sides. The answer was simple enough, and yet, too, in its very self seemed to hold a world of mockery and, yes, even futility. He was here to pick up the threads of yesterday and of those thousand yesterdays gone—anything—the grasping at any straw that might bring him into that arena where she was battling for her life, and from which, striving to shield him, she sought to bar him out.

He could not very well pick up those threads at Gentleman Laroque's, if indeed there were any threads *to* pick up, for the simple reason that the police would be there! And so he was *here*.

Gentleman Laroque! His brow furrowed. Yes, he remembered Gentleman Laroque—and Niccolo Sonnino—and a certain night that had so nearly cost young Clarie Archman his life. So Gentleman Laroque was in this new combine! Gentleman Laroque had played the rôle of safe-breaker that other night—but Gentleman Laroque had missed his calling, whether as a safe-breaker or as the gang leader that he was. He would have made an infinitely better confidence man, for he was educated, suave, and, when it suited him, polished to a degree; he possessed all the requisites, and, in abundance, the prime requisite of all—a cunning that was the cunning of a fox. Also he, Jimmie Dale, remembered something else about Gentleman Laroque; he remembered Gentleman Laroque's last words to the Gray Seal on that night in question, and now here in the darkness, waiting for he knew not what, with Laroque emerging so unexpectedly from the past, those words, hoarse in their rage and elemental fury, seemed to ring again with strange significance in his ears: "You win tonight, but we'll get you yet! Some day we'll get you, you cursed snitch, you—"

What was that?

The sound came neither from below through the open door of the basement staircase, nor yet from the front doors along the hall. The sound persisted. It was like the gnawing of a rat. And then Jimmie Dale placed its general location. It seemed to come from outside the house, and in direction from the little den or office at his right that contained the safe. He moved stealthily to the doorway, and, still in the

hall, protected by the door jamb, peered into the darkness of the room. He could see nothing.

But now the sound was still more clearly defined, and he placed it exactly. Rather than a gnawing, it was a scratching at the wall outside and below the window; and as it continued it seemed at times to grow almost human with impatience and irritability as it quickened its tempo.

And then suddenly Jimmie Dale turned his head. Imagination? No, there was another sound—and it, too, now repeated itself, low, cautious, stealthy. Some one was creeping down the third story stairs from the top of the house.

For an instant Jimmie Dale stood without movement, then a hard, quick smile compressed his lips. That scratching sound outside the window, which still persisted, had not been loud enough to *awaken* anybody. It was rather curious, rather singular! His ears, acute, trained to the slightest sound, caught the footfalls coming now along the upper hall, still low, still cautious and stealthy—and Jimmie Dale slipped across the threshold, and in an instant had passed into the library and was crouched behind the portières that hung between the two rooms.

A minute passed. A tread creaked softly on the main staircase; then a form bulked in irregular outline in the doorway of the little den, paused for the fraction of a second, came into the room, closed the door, and glided swiftly to the window. The window was cautiously opened. There was the soft *pad* of feet as a man crawled through and dropped to the floor. A hoarse whisper vibrated through the room.



“Damn it, why didn’t you keep me there all night?” a voice demanded angrily. “You didn’t go to *sleep*, did you, or forget to leave the *window* of your room open so’s you could *hear*?”

Another voice answered. The words came in a choked, broken way, as though with great effort:

“No; I—I didn’t go to sleep. Not likely! I heard you the minute you came, but—but I couldn’t help it. I had a—a bit of a turn. I came as soon as I could. I—I was sick.”

A ray of a flashlight lanced through the blackness. It played on the tall, gaunt figure of an old, gray-haired man arrayed in a dressing gown, and on a face that was drawn and pallor-like in colour.

Then darkness again.

Behind the portière, Jimmie Dale’s face suddenly hardened. There were little gray “mutton-chop” side whiskers, that was the only change. He recognised the man in an instant. It was the “Minister,” alias Patrick Denton, one of the cleverest “inside” crooks that had ever infested New York. The man, pronounced an incurable heart case, and even then supposed to be in a dying condition, had been pardoned two years ago while serving a sentence in Sing Sing. Since then he had dropped out of sight; and indeed, generally, was supposed to be dead.

There was a callous grunt from the man at the window.

“Well, you look it!” said the man. “And that’s no lie!” He laughed shortly. “And maybe it’s a good thing. You could get away with the faithful-butler-mourning-for-his-dead-master stuff without batting an eyelid, if you had to.”

There was no answer.

Jimmie Dale's hand slipped into his pocket and came out again with his automatic. So that was it! He began to understand. The Minister was back at his old inside game again—this time in the rôle of Jathan Lane's butler!

The man who had crawled in through the window spoke again—sharply now:

"Well, let's get busy! We've lost too much time as it is. If a light's safe, shoot her on; we can work quicker that way."

"Yes," said the Minister. "It's—it's safe enough." He stifled a cough. "The rest are all asleep; and on account of what happened this afternoon, I had every shade in the house drawn. I—" He broke off with a quick gasp, as coincident with the faint click of an electric-light switch, a single, shaded incandescent on the desk in front of the safe went on. "You!" he exclaimed. "I—I thought it was to be Hunchback Joe."

The fold of the portière in Jimmie Dale's hand drew closer in against the edge of the wall projection until there was left but the veriest crack. A pucker came and nested in little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He was not so sure, after all, that he had begun to understand. In view of the Tocsin's letter, he did not understand at all. The man who stood there in the room beside the Minister, the man with the cool, contemptuous black eyes, the thin, cunning lips parted in a grim smile, was Gentleman Laroque.

"So it was," said Laroque coolly. "You've got it straight. Hunchback Joe was to come here for the sparklers, smear the trail by bringing them back to me, and then I was going to slip them to old Isaac Shiftel. But Hunchback Joe couldn't come, and as it's a rather fussy job I didn't dare trust any

one else, so I came myself. I'll take them direct from here to Shiftel's."

The pucker cleared from Jimmie Dale's eyes. Shiftel—old Isaac Shiftel—the fence! The man was an outstanding figure in the underworld! Yes, he *did* begin to understand. But for once, for the first time since those days in the years gone by when the Tocsin had begun to sound those "calls to arms," the Tocsin was astray. It was not her fault. It was nothing that she could by any possibility have foreseen. Only as matters now stood the police trap at Laroque's would be abortive—it should have been at Isaac Shiftel's! Jimmie Dale's lips pressed together. Well, he knew where Isaac Shiftel lived, and instead of the police, it would perhaps be—

Jimmie Dale's mental soliloquy ended abruptly. The Minister was walking with weak, unsteady steps across the room, groping at the desk for support, and speaking as he went.

"There isn't anything the matter, is there?" he asked anxiously. "I mean nothing's gone wrong with that other thing to keep Hunchback Joe away? He's safe, isn't he?"

An oath fell softly from Gentleman Laroque's lips. He still smiled; but the cool contempt had gone from his eyes, and in its place was a smouldering passion.

"Wrong?" he echoed. "No; nothing's gone wrong, except that the whole plant is blown, the papers pinched by the police, and Hunchback Joe is dead."

"What's that, you say?" The old man swayed on his feet, his face a ghastly white. "Dead! You said—dead? I—"

Jimmie Dale straightened up involuntarily. The old man was undeniably ill, desperately ill. He had reeled and would

have fallen had not Laroque caught him and placed him in a chair.

“Brandy!” the old man gasped. “Over there—on—on that cabinet.”

Laroque procured the stimulant. The Minister gulped it down eagerly. It seemed to revive him. He stared anxiously at Laroque.

“How—what—what happened?” he whispered hoarsely.

“The police were tipped off by some one you don’t know, and by some one you do,” said Laroque between his teeth. “The some one you know was—the Gray Seal.”

“My God!” The white face was set with fear. “The police—and—Hunchback Joe dead! We—we can’t go on with this—we’d—”

“We couldn’t if Joe *weren’t* either trapped or dead,” Laroque broke in sharply. “Pull yourself together! We’ve no time to waste. Don’t you understand? It’s *safer* than ever it was! If Klanner, the bank janitor, had got his, and the fake evidence had been found the way we planted it, this little deal here to-night was all tucked away neat enough. But Klanner’s skin was saved, by luck as we thought then, though we know better now, and that put everything up in the air as far as *this* was concerned—until the police copped Joe with the goods, and Joe snuffed out. That gave them the motive again for the murder this afternoon, and gave them the man who did it. The case is closed now tighter than we figured it could be sewed up even in the first place. Get me?”

The old man shook his head. He looked furtively around him.

“I’m afraid,” he said huskily. “If the Gray Seal’s in this, it—it ain’t safe.”

“But I tell you the Gray Seal isn’t in this,” snapped Laroque impatiently. “That’s what I’m trying to get through your thick head! He and every one else will think the curtain rolled down on the *last* act when they got Hunchback Joe. It’s safe enough! It’s so safe there isn’t anything to it, if *your* end is safe. And you ought to know about that—you’ve been a year getting the dope.”

“I—I ain’t afraid of that,” said the old man. “There’s no one in the world knows how many he had. The family knew he had a lot, of course, and knew it was his hobby, and that he kept ’em here where he could look at ’em instead of in a safety deposit vault—though I guess he figured no safety deposit vault had anything on his—but they just knew he had a lot, they didn’t know how many.”

A strange light came dawning suddenly in Jimmie Dale’s eyes. Had the Tocsin been right in this respect? Was this the *real* motive for the murder—not the bank’s papers? Jathan Lane’s hobby! It was no secret. Jathan Lane was a fellow member of that most exclusive organization, the St. James Club. Dimly there came back to memory a conversation one afternoon when four or five members, Jathan Lane and himself amongst them, were gathered around one of the smoking room tables, and—

“Sure!” said Gentleman Laroque brusquely. “Well, then, what’s the matter with you? There’s no sign of any robbery; no sign of any entry into the house, not so much as an unlocked door or a scratch on a window sill; and Jathan Lane, the only man who could know that anything had been

taken—is dead. And his death”—Laroque grinned—“occurred in such a way as to make what’s done here secure from even suspicion. The bank game’s a blind. This is what we’ve been after, and now it’s open and shut. And your share is the biggest haul you ever made in your life.”

The old man stared around him. Colour crept into his cheeks and glowed in hectic spots. His eyes, deep in their sockets, began to burn with a feverish light. He pulled himself up to his feet.

“Yes, yes!” he mumbled fiercely. “Rich—ha, ha!—rich! It cannot fail; I am a fool”—he caught his breath, and swayed again on his feet. “Come on! Come on! Hurry!” he choked out.

Jimmie Dale watched them, his lips suddenly tight. They had *passed by* the safe, and were coming directly toward where he stood. Another yard and they would reach the portières. His automatic swung silently upward in his hand. And then the old man halted in front of an oil painting that hung from the wall a little less than shoulder high.

For an instant the man stood there breathing heavily, as though even the exertion of crossing the room had taxed him beyond his strength; and then with a quick movement he jerked at the edge of the frame, and the painting itself, as though it were the grooved cover of a box, slid to one side, exposing the wall, which was as bare and as innocent in appearance behind, or, rather, through the frame, as anywhere else in the room.

“Jathan Lane’s safe deposit vault,” coughed the Minister. He laughed. His cheeks were burning; his eyes were

brighter. He leaned suddenly down toward the floor. "This knot in the wainscoting—see?"

Behind the empty frame, a door in the wall swung open—and the light from the room fell upon the nickel dial of a safe.

"That's the boy!" applauded Gentleman Laroque.

"Yes, yes!" whispered the old man. "I'll open it! Wait! A—a long time it took to get the combination, but—but I got it"—his fingers were working at the dial—"there—there it is!"

"Just a second!" said Laroque coolly, as the door of the little wall safe swung open. He glanced around him, then darted across the room to a small, square table on which stood a heavy bronze vase. "Here, this will do!" he said, and laying the vase on the floor, came back with the table. "Shoot the stuff out on this!"

It took a minute, perhaps two; and then upon the table there lay a number of jewellers' cases in both plush and leather, and a dozen or more little chamois bags. Laroque was rapidly opening and shutting the cases, and as he did so the contents of each in its turn, pendants, brooches, ornaments of many designs, all of them set with diamonds, seemed to leap thirstily at the light and hail it with eager scintillating flashes before the covers could be shut down upon them again.

"That all that's in there?" demanded Laroque.

"Yes," breathed the old man. "Yes"—he rubbed his hands rapaciously together—"all except the tray he uses to paw 'em over on."



“That’s thoughtful of him!” grunted Gentleman Laroque. “Let’s have it.”

From the bottom of the safe the Minister pulled out and laid upon the table an oblong, plush-covered tray with raised edges.

“Now!” grunted Laroque again. “Open the bags, and dump the whities into the tray.”

Jimmie Dale drew in his breath. It seemed as though little rivers of fire had begun to stream from the mouths of the bags. The men were working fast now; Laroque with almost cynical composure; the old man, wrought up, clumsy in his greed, his hands trembling, mumbling, crooning to himself.

Diamonds, unset stones, of all sizes, poured into the tray; they filled it, heaped it to its edges. An inch deep they lay. It was a fortune whose value Jimmie Dale did not dare attempt to compute—a pool of immortal beauty, restless with vitality, flashing, limpid, shifting, iridescent. Here the facet of a stone struck back at the light, fiery, passionate in its challenge; there another lay, soft in its radiance, glowing, pulsing, breathing, alive.

Laroque drew a cloth bag from his pocket and unfolded it. He ran his finger through the stones, separating them into two almost equal portions; the portion nearer him he began to put into his little sack.

“Slip the rest of them into the chamois bags again, and put ’em back in the safe,” he directed tersely. “Divide ’em amongst the bags as equally as you can. And those gew-gaws in the cases, too, of course—put them back. We can’t afford to monkey with anything but the unset stones; any