

## CHAPTER XV

### INSIDE INFORMATION

IT WAS the next night—but Jimmie Dale, though at the St. James Club, was not as usual in evening attire. He was wearing a dark and very unobtrusive though fashionably cut suit of tweed as he entered the reading room, and, selecting an evening paper whose headlines afforded him a peculiar interest, seated himself in an unoccupied corner of the room. He read the headlines again. They were stretched in two rows of lurid type across the entire width of the front page:

GRAY SEAL ROBS FELLOW CROOKS  
OF \$80,000  
AFTERMATH OF BIG FLOATING  
CRAP GAME

Jimmie Dale skimmed over the first part of the text rapidly. His interest began where the "fifth" man had entered the office. The version of the affair was obviously Big Steve's. At the sound of a shot from the office one of the three remaining bandits in the card room had rushed to the office door and had found it locked. He was then joined by another of his companions, leaving one man on guard in the doorway of the card room. The two bandits broke down the office door. On the

floor, unconscious, was the leader of the hold-up gang who had originally gone into the office to open the safe. The satchel was still there, but it was empty except for a gray seal pasted inside on the bottom. The Gray Seal had apparently been hiding in the room, had waited until the safe was opened, had then deliberately shot the gang leader, had exchanged the money in the satchel for one of his wretched and despicable stickers, and had got away with the loot. Meanwhile, of course, the servants had been awakened by the noise, and the whole establishment was in an uproar. The leader of the gang had, however, regained consciousness by this time, and did not appear to be at all seriously wounded, for, unaided by his companions, he had taken to his heels as expeditiously as any of the rest. The four men, like the Gray Seal, had made their escape. No one's identity had been established.

"H'm!" commented Jimmie Dale. "Comprehensive but inaccurate!"

He lighted a cigarette, and, putting the newspaper aside, leaned back in his chair. He watched the blue spiral curling from the tip of his cigarette thoughtfully. So Silky Hines was still on the job and still going strong! That, at least, was worth knowing! Probably no more than a bullet graze that had stunned him for the moment! And nothing had been said about a certain bank having mysteriously received a certain sum of money in trust for a certain Mrs. Meegan. Just so! The bank was probably quite a little worried, and premature publicity might not have been politic! Whether they opened an account with Mrs. Meegan or not was their affair—and Mrs. Meegan's! The point was that the money, being in their custody, was *safe*. If they

established friendly and cordial relations with Mrs. Meegan, well and good; if not, well, they would have to get a receipt from Mrs. Meegan—and Mrs. Meegan would get the money in any case. So that was that!

Jimmie Dale looked up. A club attendant was standing at his elbow.

"There is a telephone call for you, Mr. Dale," said the man. "The booth on this floor, if you care to answer it, s'r."

"Thank you," said Jimmie Dale.

He rose from his chair, and, going to the telephone booth in the hall, picked up the receiver.

"Yes?" he inquired.

A voice came tensely over the wire:

"That you, Jimmie?"

"Oh, hello, Carruthers," replied Jimmie Dale. "Yes, Jimmie speaking. Anything new?"

"You bet! The Gray Seal's latest!"

"Some haul!" said Jimmie Dale brightly. "It must have been lively out at the Two Oaks. I've just finished reading about it."

"Damn it," cried Carruthers excitedly, "I know you can read! Everybody's read it. You don't think I'd call you up about *that*, do you?"

"My error!" murmured Jimmie Dale apologetically. "Well?"

"Jimmie, listen! Of all the damned nerve! Do you know what the Gray Seal has done?"

"Haven't the faintest!"

"Well, listen!"

"I'm listening," said Jimmie Dale patiently.

"Well, you're going to get a shock. He sent a parcel to Detective Sergeant Waud. It was left at the Homicide

Bureau before daylight this morning—hung on the door-knob, Jimmie. The parcel contained a note of condolence adorned with one of his infernal gray seals—and a revolver that was fitted with a silencer.”

There was a sudden gleam of laughter in Jimmie Dale's dark eyes—but his voice was plaintive as he spoke.

“I wish you wouldn't talk in riddles, Carruthers,” he complained. “I'm not very good at them. What is' the connection between a note of condolence and a lethal weapon? Was he suggesting suicide to the worthy sergeant?”

“Confound you, Jimmie!” replied Carruthers. “I tell you this is serious. It's hot stuff! Front page! The gall and egotism of that blood-drunk pervert is enough to make Satan himself sick with envy! He condoled with Waud over the fatuous results so far achieved by the police in their distracted efforts to apprehend the murderer of Ray Thorne. He ragged Waud unmercifully. Said he realized how deeply chagrined and mortified Waud would be when, if no one held out a helping hand to him, he must finally come to an understanding of his own abysmal innocuity. I don't think Waud knew what that word meant, but he looked it up and swore like hell! The note—it was all in printed characters, not a scrap of writing, Jimmie—ended up by the Gray Seal saying that, having no immediate use for the weapon himself, he begged to enclose with his compliments and in the hope that Waud's efforts thereby would be directed into more intelligent channels hereafter, the gun with which Ray Thorne had been shot. What do you think of that?”

“Not very much!” said Jimmie contemptuously.

"He's spoofing, of course. He probably picked it up out of some junk pile just to have a go at the police and pull their legs."

"Spoofing—nothing!" Carruthers' voice over the phone was at fever pitch with excitement now. "It *was* the gun that killed Ray. The markings on a bullet fired from it correspond with the markings on the bullet extracted from Ray's body."

"Good Lord!" gasped Jimmie Dale.

"Yes!" gloated Carruthers. "I thought you'd swallow hard before you were through! This opens a new field for investigation. You see where it leads to, don't you? That bird's unholy thirst for vicious notoriety will do him down yet! If that gun can be traced to where it was bought, and a description of the purchaser obtained, we'll have got a long way ahead!"

"Yes, of course!" agreed Jimmie Dale. "Naturally!"

"Well, that's all for now," said Carruthers. "Waud's turned his whole crowd loose on it, and I'll keep you posted if anything new turns up."

"Rather! I should hope so!" exclaimed Jimmie Dale fervently. "Thanks, Carruthers."

"Good-night," said Carruthers.

"Good-night," said Jimmie Dale.

There was a quizzical lift to Jimmie Dale's eyebrows as he hung up the receiver.

"Even the police are useful at times," he informed the sound-proof booth whimsically. "I just wanted to be sure. So, besides having black hair, he has a clipped left ear. We're getting on!"

He left the telephone booth, chatted for a moment with a fellow-member whom he encountered in the hall, and then sauntered leisurely into the writing room.

He glanced at his watch. It was half-past ten. He nodded to himself. That would just about give him time to write a short but rather difficult note comfortably.

He sat down at a desk and drew a sheet of note paper toward him. He sat there for some twenty minutes, at end of which time he had written no more than perhaps a dozen or fifteen lines. But they had been written to his satisfaction, for he made no changes now as he re-read them carefully; then, enclosing the sheet of paper in an envelope, he tucked the envelope into the inside pocket of his coat—and as he did so his fingers came in contact with another envelope that was already there. A grim little smile flickered across his lips. The night's agenda! Quite so! And if all went well the meeting would be called to order some time in the vicinity of midnight! It had been a busy day; it would be a busy night! He had left nothing undone that he could think of. He shrugged his shoulders. Pray heaven that fate was in a genial mood during the next few hours, that was all!

And then Jimmie Dale left the club.

Twenty minutes later, with his car parked a block away, he was walking along a shabby cross-street in the lower East Side where evening clothes, had he worn them, would have attracted very undesirable attention. His tweed suit attracted none. And presently he slipped unnoticed into the dark mouth of a lane. A minute more, and, entering by the French window, he was standing in the Sanctuary.

No one had seen him enter, and he had no need of any light that might proclaim his presence now. He crossed the room and from the opening behind the movable section of the baseboard took out a parcel and his

make-up box. With these, as unobtrusively as he had come, he returned to his car.

Thereafter, once free of the New York and Brooklyn traffic, he drove at a stiff clip—the Long Island roads were good, and Charleton Park Manor was at least an hour away!

The man with the clipped left ear! Again and again as Jimmie Dale left the miles behind him, his mind reverted to the masked figure who last night in Big Steve's office had shot down Silky Hines. It was no longer a moot question whether this was the man who had murdered Ray—it was now an established fact. He, Jimmie Dale, had had very little doubt about it, but between doubt and certainty there was a wide gulf. He had bridged that gulf—but *who* was this man, and *how*, and *where* was he stealing Daddy Ratzler's secrets? One of the gang? Hardly! From the Tocsin's report of the conversation that had taken place at Daddy Ratzler's bedside last night, Daddy Ratzler's *intimate* followers would appear to be limited to the four who had been present there—and all four had afterward been at the Two Oaks together.

Jimmie Dale shook his head suddenly over the wheel of his speeding car. No, there perhaps might be another! He had forgotten—the Angel! A nice moniker! It was the Angel who was to have gone to Ray in person for the blue envelope. But the Angel still might be one of the four. The Tocsin had placed by name only three of the men last night. But did this matter very much? Whether Daddy Ratzler's group numbered four or five it was almost fantastic to entertain the idea that the man in question was one of them.

Well, then, where was the leak coming from that

supplied Ray's murderer with the advance information that enabled him to pick Daddy Ratzler's plums? Last night, for instance! It would have been a very juicy plum if the man had had only the gang itself to deal with! The mail? Daddy Ratzler's concern about his letters! Was that the answer?

Again Jimmie Dale shook his head. That also was almost too fantastic to be worthy of consideration. Daddy Ratzler was the brains of the organization. Daddy Ratzler formulated the plans. The gang wouldn't be writing letters to Daddy Ratzler about his own schemes! But why, then, did Daddy Ratzler examine his letters with a magnifying glass?

"Damn!" said Jimmie Dale heartily.

One phase of the blue envelope mystery only led to another. One question began a cycle. He wrenched his mind back to what was for him now the main consideration. There would be no difficulty now in identifying the man with that clipped left ear; what was vital now was to make contact with him again. There was only one way—through Daddy Ratzler; granting, of course, that the man would go on picking plums. Last night the Tocsin, as well as Ray's murderer, had been able to obtain advance information of one of Daddy Ratzler's schemes. She might be able to do so again—and then again she might not! There might be many games pulled off in which the man with the clipped ear would be an uninvited participant, and neither he, Jimmie Dale, nor the Tocsin, know anything about them.

But there *was* one plum, and the biggest of all, still to be picked, which the man he was after now would not fail to snatch if he could—the plum for whose possession he had futilely murdered Ray. The blue envelope'



Silky Hines in the course of the discussion that the Tocsin had overheard last night had said, basing his statement on the assumption that the blue envelope was never recovered, and providing of course that the Gray Seal could not read its riddle, that "the pot wasn't lost yet" and that it was only a question of "waiting for openers, which wouldn't be long in coming." Translated into English that meant the loss of the blue envelope speiled only a temporary delay in pulling off what had all the earmarks of being the master coup of Daddy Ratzler's long and nefarious career. Ray's murderer, unless his own peculiar source of inside information had suddenly dried up, would certainly be present on that occasion; but the only way that he, Jimmie Dale, could be certain of being present, too, was to discover in some way or another, and *beforehand*, what the message was that the blue envelope contained.

"And," confessed Jimmie Dale to the headlights' glare along the road, "I haven't had any luck so far with those beastly acid and test tubes! All I've done, I fancy, is make a mess and worry Jason! Most perplexing thing, that blue envelope! It means everything now if I am ever to get that hound and keep my promise to Ray. I can't afford to let it beat me; but, then"—a sudden cryptic smile crossed Jimmie Dale's lips—"I'm rather sure it won't—before I'm through!"

The miles and the minutes sped away together. Midnight came—and passed. And then suddenly Jimmie Dale slowed his car. Thanks to that boulder, Markel, of the days gone by, the surroundings were very definitely familiar. Charleton Park Manor was just ahead—and here was the wagon track where he had parked his car that night, and which, if followed for a

quarter of a mile, the Tocsin said, would bring him to Daddy Ratzler's house.

Jimmie Dale swung the car into the wagon track, but he did not follow it for more than a hundred yards—the sound of a motor would travel far on the night air, and Daddy Ratzler was noted for his acute hearing! At the first opening disclosed by the headlights, Jimmie Dale ran the car far enough in among the trees to hide it from sight should anyone chance along the wagon track.

And then the lights went out.

From under the front seat Jimmie Dale took out several strips of heavy black cloth which he pinned across the windshield and the front windows; then, climbing over into the back of the car, he pulled down the rear curtains. The car had blended into the surrounding darkness.

And now, confident that it could not be seen from without, Jimmie Dale switched on the little dome light overhead and opened the parcel that he had brought with him from the Sanctuary. He laid the contents out on the back seat—the old pair of shoes with broken laces; the mismated socks; the patched trousers, frayed at the bottoms; the disreputable collarless flannel shirt; the torn and filthy coat; the shapeless and dirt-stained slouch hat. And for a moment he stared at these in somber fashion, and almost as though a puzzled curiosity due to some vaguely familiar sight had been suddenly aroused. He had not seen them for years. He had put them away, preserved them, it was true, against an unforeseen need, but he had never expected to see them again. They brought back unnumbered memories. Here were the clothes of Larry the Bat, the dope fiend, a one-time habitu e of every crooked joint in the Bad Lands,

an intimate associate of thugs and criminals, and later known and execrated alike by the police, the underworld, and the public at large—as *the Gray Seal*. Larry the Bat—who was to live again to-night!

Jimmie Dale began rapidly to make the exchange of clothing, retaining the leather girdle he was already wearing, and transferring the contents of the pockets of the tweed suit to those of the disreputable rags he was now donning. Since that night long ago in the old Crime Club when the Magpie had stumbled upon the fact that Larry the Bat and the Gray Seal were one, and had spread his tidings throughout the underworld, and the news had swept like wildfire to the police and press, Larry the Bat had virtually disappeared from the land of the living—but the Gray Seal had kept steadily at work. Neither the police nor the underworld, however, were blind fools! The obvious had stared them in the face. It was realized at once that Larry the Bat was only *one* of the characters that cloaked the Gray Seal—though the guise in which he had still continued to masquerade had never been discovered. And Daddy Ratzler was one of those who had been personally acquainted, quite well acquainted, with Larry the Bat in the days gone by. Daddy Ratzler was one of those who *knew* that Larry the Bat was the Gray Seal. But, also, Daddy Ratzler was a wily and tricky customer!

The make-up box now claimed Jimmie Dale's attention. But he did not work so quickly now, as his wrists, neck, throat, and face received their quota of stain, and the shapely, well-cared-for hands grew unkempt and grimy, artfully black beneath the finger nails. The vision mirror was awkwardly placed and small. The rehabilitation of Larry the Bat could have

been more readily and simply effected at the Sanctuary. Exactly! But the risk had been too great. Daddy Ratzler was not the only one who would recognize Larry the Bat on sight. There were many a private citizen, many a denizen of the underworld, and many a member of the police who could do so, too—traffic officers some of the latter now, probably. Larry the Bat driving in the seclusion of a closed car at night might ordinarily be expected to pass unnoticed, though there was always the possibility of a traffic mix-up and an inquisitive officer, or a perhaps trivial incident of some kind that would force him to alight and expose himself; but the greatest danger had lurked in the fact that the Gray Seal was in the limelight again—and wanted for the murder of Ray Thorne! With the police at fever heat, even the glimpse of a suspicious-looking character at the wheel of a car might have been enough to trip him up and bring recognition in its wake—and recognition meant ruin, and disaster, inevitable and swift. “Death to the Gray Seal!” That ugly slogan was to-day as clamorous as ever! It would have been foolhardy, an act of insanity, to attempt it!

He stared into the mirror as his fingers deftly inserted little distorting pieces of wax behind his ears, in his nostrils, and under his upper lip—the features reflected there were dissolute and vicious now, and from under drug-laden lids the narrowed eyes of Larry the Bat stared back at him. He paid himself a grim compliment. There would have been no question about the certainty of recognition had he risked exposure and been seen by anyone who had ever known—Larry the Bat!