

CHAPTER XX

THE TWO VOICES

Beaton! All that was primal, a surge of passion, the urge to kill, a blind fury, swept over Jimmie Dale. He was not conscious that he had drawn his automatic from his pocket, but it was in his hand now. Beaton! He not only knew at last who Ray's murderer was, but the man was now at his mercy.

And then cold common sense and reason came. The man's life was forfeit—but not at his hands. He, Jimmie Dale, was not a murderer too! It was enough now for the moment that he had identified his man. That was all he had asked for, striven for, up to now. True, his task was not yet done. *He* knew that Beaton was the murderer, *he* could prove it; but it still remained to prove it to judge and jury—and the Gray Seal could hardly take the witness stand! Well, he had quite fully realized that all along, hadn't he? That was the last phase of the problem which he had always known he would have to face once he had run his quarry to earth—and he was face to face with that last phase of the problem now.

Where passion a moment before had held him in its sway, Jimmie Dale's brain was working now coolly, methodically, judicially—but in his eyes, that never left the figure standing there beside the table, there was something more deadly and remorseless than any sudden

flare of impetuous and unbridled passion, could ever bring. So Beaton, in spite of his alibi that had satisfied Detective Sergeant Waud and the police in general—yes, and until now, one Jimmie Dale as well—was the guilty man!

Where was the flaw in that alibi that had escaped detection? His mind searched back for an instant over Beaton's statements to the police—and almost instantly dismissed the question from his mind. That did not matter for the time being; nor did it matter at this moment how or in what manner the proof of guilt would be forthcoming. He knew now who the man with the clipped ear was; and, with that knowledge in his possession, Beaton would never escape. He had promised Ray that he would "get" the murderer; he had promised himself that the Gray Seal should be proven innocent of Ray's death—and both of those promises would be kept. There would be a way, and he would find it. What mattered now at this moment, and from now on until that way was found, was that Beaton should not take alarm—and it would, for instance, be exceedingly unfortunate if Beaton discovered that the existence of this secret cellar was not only known, but that he was being watched at this precise moment by someone beneath these steps here!

Jimmie Dale smiled coldly. Quite so! But there was, however, nothing to fear on that score; for, quite apart from the protection afforded by the steps, the steps themselves were in almost total darkness since the rays diffused by the lamp did not reach more than halfway to them.

Jimmie Dale's smile became whimsical. It was almost like watching the lighted screen of a moving picture

from the darkened body of the house—only with decidedly less comfort! Beaton had placed his valise on the table and had opened it. He took out from it now a bottle of whisky. From the washstand he procured a glass, and, pouring out a stiff portion, tossed the liquor down raw. Then he set the glass and bottle on the table and walked over to the speaking tube.

“Hello, Daddy!” he called. “You there?”

Apparently receiving no reply, he flung himself into the easy chair, which he pulled up within reach of the table—and helped himself again to the bottle.

Beaton—and Daddy Ratzler! The two voices! Jimmie Dale nodded to himself in grim understanding. From the moment the Tocsin had mentioned her discovery of the speaking tube, it had seemed at least a fair inference—unless, as she had suggested, it was Silky Hines or some other one of the gang whom Daddy Ratzler had visited here that night—that it was Daddy Ratzler himself who was the Judas and who was playing fast and loose with his own followers. And now with the appearance on the scene of Beaton, the actual “plum-picker” himself, that inference had become fact, undeniable, obvious. There was, however, ordinarily speaking, nothing amazing in that. Daddy Ratzler was quite capable of it—or of anything else however foul that would feather his nest—providing he was confident that his own skin was safe. But with Beaton! Beaton was still but a young man, certainly not more than thirty. How far back, and where and how in his criminal career, had Daddy Ratzler picked Beaton up? Daddy Ratzler was playing the most dangerous game known to the underworld; and, furthermore, he was playing it in this case, not merely against a few local crooks who had put blind and mis-

guided trust in his leadership, but apparently against a powerful and widespread organization—whose tentacles reached to Europe. His life would go out like a snuffed candle if he were caught. He would have to be very sure indeed of the man with whom he entered into a partnership of this kind! And he had entered into it with Beaton!

Beaton! Jimmie Dale studied the man, as the one-time valet sat there now in the easy chair. He had known Beaton, of course, as one knows a friend's valet, from the time the fellow had entered Ray Thorne's service—but he had never been *interested* in Beaton until now! Beaton had black hair, of course—the Ferret had been quite right about that—but otherwise the Beaton of to-night was not the Beaton who so often had bowed him, Jimmie Dale, into Ray Thorne's home. The man was no longer the polite and gracious servant; and, no longer playing that part, the mask of respectability had dropped from his face and he was—himself. It was a crafty, cynical, vicious face that loomed up in the lamp-light now out of that chair. The man must have been a master of facial control to have smiled his way about so disarmingly while in Ray Thorne's employ. Possibly that accounted for Daddy Ratzler's choice! Daddy Ratzler, through long years of evil-doing, was a competent judge of evil men!

The minutes passed. At intervals Beaton had recourse to the bottle, and at intervals got up and went to the speaking tube; but it was not until the expiration of fully half an hour, so far as Jimmie Dale was able to judge the passage of time, before there was any response from the other end of the tube.

The conversation was not prolonged.

"Hurry up and come down here, Daddy!" said Beaton impatiently—and flung himself back into his chair again.

Jimmie Dale, with infinite caution, shifted his position so far as the restricted space would permit. To remain half-stooped, half-crouched beneath these steps here for any extended period of time was not without its drawbacks, and his cramped muscles were beginning to protest vigorously against the unusual treatment to which they were being subjected. But, at that, he told himself philosophically, they would probably be worse before they were better! And there were untold compensations! Here was Daddy Ratzler now! His footsteps, hurrying, were sounding out there in the cellar. Daddy Ratzler hadn't lost any time. He appeared to be as impatient to join Beaton as Beaton was to have him.

There was no sound as the secret door opened and closed, just the sudden creaking of the steps above Jimmie Dale's head—and a minute later Daddy Ratzler, a little breathless from his haste, was facing Beaton across the table.

"Was he there?" Daddy Ratzler demanded excitedly. "Did you get it?"

Beaton lurched up from his chair, an evil grin on his face.

"Sure!" he said. "Sure, I got it—and so did he!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Daddy Ratzler sharply. "Well, you will tell me all that in a minute. Let me see the stuff. My God, we've risked enough for it! Let me see it!"

Beaton reached into the valise and produced a large package, paper-wrapped, and tied with strong cord.

"I had a look at it," he said. "He must have done some slick work to have got it all through the customs

at Quebec or Montreal, or wherever it was he landed and pulled the stunt. I've got to hand it to him for that. I suppose he lumped it all together into this parcel after he got ashore."

Daddy Ratzler's fingers were eagerly, avariciously at work on the package.

"The customs!" he sniffed. "Bah! They hadn't a chance with the Spider! He had shore lines out everywhere in Canada, and he's been putting it over long before a lot of those birds wore pants! He used to work for the big London ring until Frenchy Jacob got him to come in with us—this time. That's why we kept holding off and not sending anything across for the last few months, isn't it?—waiting for him to do the trick, and letting the stuff pile up. That's why this is the biggest shipment we ever made, isn't it? There wasn't anyone could touch the Spider at this game—millions in duties, to say nothing of the pinched swag—he's had the Secret Service trying to spot him for years, but they didn't have a look-in with him because one rule he never broke was never to come over the American line himself. He hasn't put his foot in the United States for twenty years!"

"Well, he won't bother any of the watchdogs on either side of the border any more—but we should worry!" observed Beaton callously.

Daddy Ratzler did not appear to hear the remark. He was too intent on opening the package. And now his hands were trembling, and a hectic flush was coloring his deep-sunken cheeks, as a number of small packages were produced from the large one.

Jimmie Dale could not see as well as he would have liked, but he could see well enough to realize what was

going on! The valise had been set down on the floor, and little strips of cotton wadding were now being unrolled and spread out on the top of the table. And now this snowy bed, even under nothing stronger than lamp-light, began to sparkle, and to become alive with innumerable little scintillating flashes. Diamonds! Unset stones! A great quantity of them! Yes, it was quite true, the smuggling of stones from Europe had become a very painful thorn in the side of the United States government—and these had not only been smuggled, but a good many of them, most of them probably, had doubtless been stolen, and then bought for the account of the “ring” from the swarming thieves on the continent by the fences of Paris, Vienna, Rome, and God knew where else! How many lives had they cost? This pair of nauseous rats, traitors even to their own kind, had themselves accounted for two!

Daddy Ratzler’s eyes were burning in their hollow sockets, as, his fingers shaking with greed, he lifted up now one stone and now another for closer inspection.

“Yes, yes!” he gloated. “It was worth the risk! To hell with Frenchy Jacob and all the rest of them! And how would they ever know anyhow? We were too clever for them, eh, you and old Daddy Ratzler? Little beauties! Big beauties! They’re worth half a million here if they’re sold right. Half a million! Half a——” He leaned abruptly across the table toward Beaton. The avarice in his face had given place to sudden suspicion. His voice rasped and croaked. “Are you holding any out on me?” he demanded. “Are they *all* here?”

Beaton poured a drink from the bottle—and leered at Daddy Ratzler over the glass.

"And his own son, too!" he mourned plaintively. "Think of that!"

"Bah!" snarled Daddy Ratzler.

"Bah, yourself!" retorted Beaton in a sweep of rage as he gulped down his liquor. "You may be my father, but you're so near your dotage that you're getting to be nothing but a damned old fool! If I'd been playing that game, I could have pinched the lot and flown the coop, couldn't I? And what would you have done? Advertised in the papers for the son you never owned? Want to search my pockets?"

A frightened look crept into Daddy Ratzler's face.

"No, no!" he protested placatingly. "We won't quarrel. You're a good boy, Harry. You always were. And haven't I always taken good care of you? I could see you were smart when you were only a kid—smart enough so that later on you and me'd pull a lot of things together. And we've made a lot out of no one knowing you were my son. A lot of things, Harry, like"—his fingers trembled over the spoils on the table—"like this."

"Yes," grimaced Beaton maliciously, "and like me feeding arsenic to Blotz until he died so's you'd get this dump out here all for yourself. And like us taking Big Heinie for a ride right here in this little old hole, and afterwards burying what was left of him under the cement down there in the corner because we found out he was the bird that had got wise to the Blotz killing and was asking for five grand to be left under some doorstep somewhere to keep his mouth shut. He got his five grand, and he kept his mouth shut all right—and we got the five grand back! Yes, I'll say we've pulled a few together, and that you've taken good care of me,

and that I've been well brought up, but maybe it's just as well that the mother died out there in—where did you tell me once it was?—Mexico?—when I was born!”

Daddy Ratzler's tongue was circling his lips, and he was looking furtively around him now.

“Heinie!” his voice rose in a jerky squeak. “Heinie's dead years ago. What are you bringing him into this for? What are you trying to do to me?”

“Make you sweat for what you said to me a minute ago, you old skate!” said Beaton viciously. “Age is telling on your nerve—father mine! Heinie isn't the only one under the cement here. We ought to get some of those cracks filled up.”

“Damn you,” screamed Daddy Ratzler, “hold your tongue!” And then abjectly: “I didn't mean what I said, Harry. That's a good boy! I know you wouldn't do——”

“Have a drink!” invited Beaton caustically—and pushed the bottle toward Daddy Ratzler.

Father and son! Jimmie Dale's face was set and hard as he watched Daddy Ratzler reach eagerly for the bottle. Daddy Ratzler had kept his secret well! The underworld had had no inkling that Daddy Ratzler had bred, if that were possible, a greater monster than himself! So this accounted for the unholy alliance between the two! It was not pleasant—that reference to Blotz and Heinie! With Ray and the Spider of last night the known murder score now stood at four. How many more were there to be added for the years during which this inhuman pair had worked together?

Beaton was speaking again.

“Forget all that, and let's size up the lay,” he said

almost amiably. "We've got the goods. What about peddling out some of the sparklers and turning them into cash?"

But now Daddy Ratzler seemed to have recovered his nerve, for he shook his head decidedly.

"Not yet," he said. "It'd be too dangerous till we see how the break goes. Some of 'em will be coming over from Paris, and Silky Hines is no fool, and if there's a lot of loose stones showing up they'll have something to work on. And then there's the Spider. What about him?"

"I've told you, haven't I? I bumped him off. I went up there the next day, but I didn't do anything that night because I couldn't find a boat that would fill the bill. I didn't dare hire one. Get me? I had to pinch one."

"Sure!" Daddy Ratzler was fingering the stones again. "Sure—that's right."

"Well, the next night—that's last night—there was a hell of a storm; but I got a boat and showed the light, and the Spider showed one from the shore. I ran the boat in, the Spider came to meet me with his lantern and that package in his hand, and"—an ugly grin spread over Beaton's face—"having a filial duty to perform I gave him the spot. He didn't know who I was, but I couldn't let him live and tell the gang that, getting nervous after hanging around there a week with half a million whities on him and no one showing up, and not daring to write because he knew the tip had gone out, that the post office was taking a peek at all of Daddy Ratzler's mail before it was delivered, he telephoned long-distance to Daddy Ratzler, and told Daddy Ratzler where and how to meet him, same as had been originally planned—only

Daddy Ratzler kept that telephone call a deep, dark secret, and pinched the swag for himself. No, the Spider'll never give that away, 'cause he's where they don't talk now; and neither Silky Hines nor none of the rest of them will ever know. So, you see, there's nothing to worry about on that lay."

But again Daddy Ratzler shook his head.

"That end of it's all right, and the way we figured," he said. "But there's something else. The police'll find the Spider. Maybe they'll identify the body: If they do, Silky Hines and the crowd on the other side'll know that somebody's got the stones away from him—and the ring's big enough to put the screws on every fence from here to California."

Beaton scowled, and then he nodded.

"You're coming back, Daddy!" he admitted. "Well, what's the answer? You never said anything about this when you sent me chasing up there."

"Time enough when we got the stones!" grunted Daddy Ratzler. "We've got 'em now. I never thought we would when that damned Gray Seal got away with the blue envelope. I knew, and so did Silky Hines, that the Spider would have to take the risk of getting into communication with us somehow sooner or later, but I wasn't banking on getting a lone break, and being able to slip that telephone message over to you the way I did. But now we've got the goods, we'll play our hand. If the Spider isn't identified, we can start cashing in a few—but not around here. Out West. That'll be your job. If they get wise to the Spider, the stones will be safer than in a deposit vault down here, and we'll hang onto them until I size up what the boys are going to do. You leave that to me, Harry, my boy—Daddy Ratz-

ler'll be in on the conferences and'll be raising hell with the rest of them."

Beaton was rocking slightly on his feet.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Have another drink!"

"No," said Daddy Ratzler tersely. "And you let it alone yourself. You've had enough. There's something else we've got to think about."

"I can think better when I've got half a skinful," said Beaton, and helped himself again—liberally. "What is it?"

Daddy Ratzler's voice was suddenly a half snarl, half whine.

"The Gray Seal," he said.

"Well, what about him?" demanded Beaton. "That envelope he handed you was either a fake, or else something was wrong with the ink to begin with; but in either case it didn't get him anywhere. What are you worrying about?"

Daddy Ratzler moistened his lips with his tongue.

"About the Gray Seal, I tell you!" he reiterated with fierce, nervous insistence. "It doesn't matter whether the envelope was a fake or not, we're not through with him. He'll show up again. He knows I'm after something big, and he'll never let go. He never has yet. I'm afraid, if you want the truth. Nobody ever found out how he got next to things—and he got next to hundreds of them. He's in league with hell itself—do you understand that? How did he find out about that envelope in Thorne's safe? How did he find out that I had anything to do with it? That's what we're up against!"

Beaton's fingers crept to the bottle's neck.

"You mean," he inquired a little thickly, "you're afraid he'll come around to make another friendly call

to find out how you're getting on with the blue envelope stuff, or maybe that he'll find out you've annexed the big haul yourself?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I—hic—hope he does!" stated Beaton complacently.

"You leave that stuff alone!" snarled Daddy Ratzler. "You're talking like a fool!"

"Is that so?" drawled Beaton. "Are you going to keep on staying out here?"

Daddy Ratzler stared.

"What's that got to do with——"

"You answer my question," Beaton cut in with another hiccough. "What're your plans?"

Daddy Ratzler hesitated an instant, eyeing Beaton and the bottle angrily.

"No; I'm not going to stay out here after to-night," he snapped. "I wouldn't have come back at all after I'd once got out of bed, except that I expected you either last night or to-night. I came out here when I was sick because I didn't want to take any chances on the Gray Seal knowing where I was. And that's another thing he found out! So far as that is concerned now it doesn't matter whether I'm here or in New York."

"What's the big idea for making the move, then?"

Daddy Ratzler's face was crafty again.

"If the Spider's identified," he said, "things'll start humming in New York, and I've got to be there every minute to see that Silky Hines and the boys don't get any wrong ideas into their heads. And, besides, there's Pascal. Pascal's deaf—and dumb mentally. That's why he's here. He thinks it was only a burglar the other night when the Gray Seal broke in, and that's all right; but

there's been too much going on around this house lately. He's never had a suspicion that everything wasn't straight out here, and I can't afford to let him get one into his nut now. Pascals are hard to find. Everybody around here has known Pascal for years—Pascal makes the place *safe*."

"Sounds reasonable," commented Beaton. "So you're going back to New York for keeps to-morrow, and you're figuring to wake up some night with the Gray Seal sticking his gun in your ribs. Is that—hic!—the idea? Sure, it is! And he'll ask nice and polite for his share. Well, the answer's easy; no use—hic!—having trouble with him. We'll give him his share, that's all."

"*What!*" Daddy snatched at the bottle, but Beaton forestalled him:

"That's all right," said Beaton with a hard grin. "Here's to you! One more! Didn't I tell you hootch always made me think better? Sure, we'll—hic!—give it to him—all that's coming to him. Now, you listen to me!" Beaton's voice sharpened suddenly. "I know all about the Gray Seal. I know he'll show up again before long as well as you do. But he's just a crook—see? Out for what he can get! Well, he'll get it! Maybe he's found out about last night, but I don't think so. Anyway, when he's got his gun on you, fall for his threats. You've always—hic!—been a slick actor. Let him wheedle the whole story about the blue envelope out of you, and how you double-crossed your bosom pals, and that you've got the goods out here. See? Then bring him out here for the—divide! He'll come. He started it himself. He won't smell any trap. Bring him down *here*."

A sudden sound like an ugly cackle issued from Daddy Ratzler's lips. He began to rub his hands together again.

"Like Heinie!" he whispered. "You're a good boy, Harry! You're a good boy! Drink all you like!"

"Damn him!" exploded Beaton in a burst of rage. "I owe him one myself for that night at the Two Oaks. Yes, like Heinie! He'll never—hic!—leave here alive. I'll sleep out here for a while. I'll be here every night after ten o'clock. You bring him along!"

"Yes!" The breath hissed out of Daddy Ratzler. "Yes! God, and I was afraid of him! *Yes!*"

"And another thing!" said Beaton, his lips parted over set teeth. "Don't have anybody hanging around you any more at night to queer the game. Make it—hic!—easy for him! Get rid of that old hag—what'd you call her?—Mother Margot?—that you've got out here. You're not sick now, and you don't need a nurse any more. That's a good enough excuse."

"I was going to anyhow"—Daddy Ratzler nodded his head in vigorous agreement—"on account of Silky Hines or some of the boys being likely to keep blowing into the office, or of me telephoning a lot. I wasn't going to have her there, and I don't want her here. A few dollars and a lot of promises'll satisfy her. You can leave that to me. She's out from to-morrow morning."

Beaton held the bottle up to the lamplight.

"It's damned near gone," he grumbled. "I can't think any more. Put those sparklers away where the—hic!—moths won't get at them, and beat it upstairs. I'm going to sleep here, and I want to get to bed. Had a hard night"—he finished the bottle—"hic!—and a hard day."

"I don't know what night he'll come," said Daddy Ratzler in sudden anxiety, as he began to roll up and replace the strips of cotton wadding in the original

package. "So how are you going to know? And what's the plan?"

Beaton was beginning to undress.

"I'll hear you coming out there in the cellar," he yawned. "You leave the rest to me. He'll never get further than just inside the door here—hic!—alive!"

Jimmie Dale was aching in every limb and muscle, but he made no movement other than to compress his lips more tightly together. He was intent now on watching Daddy Ratzler. Daddy Ratzler with the package in his hand was pulling at one of the bureau drawers—but instead of the drawer being opened, the entire front of the bureau swung outward, disclosing a large metal-lined compartment that appeared to be already filled almost to repletion—but what its contents were, he could not tell at that distance, though he had little doubt that they were as ill-gotten as the package that Daddy Ratzler now added to the rest.

Daddy Ratzler was chuckling gleefully as he closed the front of the bureau again.

"You're a good boy, Harry!" he smirked. "A good boy! God, I ain't scared any more!

Beaton had already flung himself on the bed.

"All right!" he grunted. "Blow out the lamp, and beat it!"

"Yes!" chortled Daddy Ratzler happily. "Yes! Good-night."

The place was in darkness. The treads above Jimmie Dale's head creaked—and then Daddy Ratzler's footsteps died away across the cellar.

Jimmie Dale smiled queerly. It was not every man who was privileged to hear his own murder planned! A rush of emotions surged over him. He was conscious

of a sense of revolting unreality, of abhorrence, of mental nausea, of a foul taste that was in his mouth, of contamination. Flesh and blood! Father and son! Not men! Ghouls!

Stertorous breathing—a snore—sounded from the direction of the bed. Beaton was fast falling into heavy, drunken slumber.

Jimmie Dale began to flex his muscles—and winced with pain.

A minute, two, went by—and then Beaton, snoring loudly, was alone. And presently a shadow, that was Jimmie Dale, crept past Daddy Ratzler's closed and snuttered window and along the veranda to a wide-open, unlighted window beyond.

"Marie!" he breathed.

"I'm here, Jimmie," she whispered back. "Be careful! Daddy Ratzler has just come upstairs, and he hasn't gone to bed yet."

"I know it," Jimmie Dale answered. "I ache. I've only just crawled out from under the steps of that murder hole."

"Oh!" she said "I wondered where you were, because I couldn't think of any place in there to hide. I was frightened when I heard Daddy Ratzler going down into the cellar. I went into his room and listened through the tube I heard nearly everything that was said, and it was horrible; but I soon knew, of course, that, wherever you were, you were all right, and hadn't been seen. Oh, it was horrible," she repeated; "but I was so glad, so very, very glad to know that old Pascal wasn't one of them. Jimmie"—her whisper was suddenly tense—"who was that beast down there with Daddy Ratzler? I know from what was said that he is

Daddy Ratzler's son, and that he must be the man who murdered Ray; but do you know *who* he is?"

"Beaton!" said Jimmie Dale grimly.

"*Jimmie!*" Her hand reached out over the sill and clutched at Jimmie Dale's arm. "Ray's valet!"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"Still down there. Asleep—and half-drunk."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing—yet. We know he killed Ray; but Mother Margot and the Gray Seal can't testify! I've got to get some other kind of evidence than that!"

"How?"

"I don't know. Somehow! I only know that he'll never escape now—and neither will Daddy Ratzler! And now, listen, Marie! You heard Daddy Ratzler say that he was going to let you go to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you say good-bye to Daddy Ratzler to-morrow, say good-bye to Mother Margot, too. That is what I particularly wanted to say to you. With your association with Daddy Ratzler severed, your work is finished. I don't know what the break is going to be, or what the final round is going to be like; but I want to know that whatever happens you are safe and completely out of the picture. Do you understand, Marie?"

"Y-yes," she said a little dubiously.

"All right! Go back to that hotel of yours and be 'Agnes Watkins' for the next few days. We can see each other all we like there, and we can arrange for Marie LaSalle's 'return' to New York whenever it seems advisable. You promise, dear?"

"Yes," she said, after another instant's hesitation. "If you think it's best—I promise."

The whispers died away—but for a little while the shadow that was Jimmie Dale still lingered there at the window. And then a whisper again:

"Till to-morrow, Marie. Good-night, dear."

And five minutes later, Jimmie Dale, at the wheel of his car, was speeding back toward New York.

He drove fast. His eyes were on the road—but his mind was far afield. The proof of Beaton's guilt! The evidence that would convict the man of Ray's murder! How? He shook his head. The Tocsin had asked that same question. He had not known the answer then. He did not know now.

Half an hour passed, and then suddenly Jimmie Dale spoke aloud.

"Carruthers!" he exclaimed—and began to laugh softly. "Carruthers—and the Gray Seal! Yes! And rather rich, too!"

He looked at his watch. It had seemed as though half the night were gone, but it was still only half-past ten. Of course! He had reached Daddy Ratzler's house just after dark. Carruthers would almost certainly be at the newspaper office for some time yet.

The speed of the car increased. There was only one man in the world whose word he would dare trust under like circumstances. Carruthers! If Carruthers gave his word, Carruthers would keep it to the letter. And Carruthers *would* give it. Carruthers would do anything to bring the murderer of Ray Thorne to book.

"Yes!" said Jimmie Dale grimly. "That's the answer! The last round—with Carruthers as referee!"

Jimmie Dale was eating up the miles now, and it still

lacked a few minutes to eleven when he entered a telephone booth at the Grand Central station, and, calling the office of the *Morning News-Argus*, asked for Mr. Carruthers.

A moment's wait, and then Carruthers' voice came over the wire.

"Yes?" demanded Carruthers briskly. "What is it?"

"Is dat Mr. Carruthers?" inquired Jimmie Dale.

"Yes! Who's speaking?"

"Dis is Larry de Bat," said Jimmie Dale. "De Gray Seal."

"Who?"

"Aw, can dat fancy surprise stuff!" said Larry the Bat wearily. "I'm tellin' youse, ain't I, dat it's de Gray Seal? Dis ain't de first time dat I've slipped youse something juicy over de phone. Youse've made some dirty cracks about me, but I don't hold dat up against youse partic'lar 'cause some of de other papers has tried to be just as dirty, an'——"

Jimmie Dale stuck his tongue in his cheek—Carruthers was indulging in a flood of unprintable language.

"Dat's O.K. wid me," interposed Larry the Bat soothingly. "Get it all off yer chest at once!"

"Well, what do you want this time?" demanded Carruthers savagely.

"Me?" purred Larry the Bat. "I don't want nothin'. I was only tryin' to slip youse somethin'. I heard youse was a pal of Ray Thorne, an' dat youse'd like to get de guy dat bumped him off."

An inarticulate sound, as of one in the throes of strangulation, reached Jimmie Dale from the other end of the wire.

"I didn't get dat," complained Larry the Bat. "Wot did youse say?"

"I said," stuttered Carruthers in his wrath, "that's why I'd give every cent I'm worth to get my hands on *you!*"

"Well, youse can do it—an' it won't cost youse a nickel," grinned Larry the Bat. "How about to-morrow night? D'youse think yer office boy would let youse off fer a few hours?"

"For the second time, what do you want?" barked Carruthers.

"Say, listen!" Larry the Bat's voice was suddenly earnest. "I never handed youse no bum steer when I called youse up before, did I?"

"N-no," admitted Carruthers grudgingly.

"Well, I ain't handin' youse none now," stated Larry the Bat sharply. "Mabbe I don't stand in wid de clergy or de police, but I got me pride. See? I don't pull dat sort of stuff. It wasn't me dat took dat Thorne guy fer a ride, an' I'm sore on de bird dat's planted it on me. See? Well, I got a'ter him, dat's all. I know who he is. An' if youse wants him, I'll hand him over to youse wid de goods on him to-morrow night. Wot d'youse say?"

"Where?" inquired Carruthers tersely.

"Nix on dat!" said Larry the Bat curtly. "Youse'll say yes or no. An' youse'll come alone—get me?"

"And suppose I agree," said Carruthers after a moment's silence, "and bring the police with me to get—*you?*"

"It's fifty-fifty," retorted Larry the Bat. "If youse tries any funny business dere won't be nothin' doin', dat's all."

Again a silence, and then Carruthers' voice rasped:

"You'll take my word?"

"Sure! I ain't asked youse fer nothin' else, has I?"

"A high compliment! Thank you!"

"Dat's all right!" said Larry the Bat graciously. "But wot d'youse say?"

Again still another silence, and then deliberately:

"I understand that you will point out the man who murdered Ray Thorne?"

"Naw!" snorted Larry the Bat in disgust. "I didn't say nothin' like dat at all. I said I'd make youse a present of him—wid de goods on him."

"My God!" ejaculated Carruthers heavily. "Is this straight?"

"It ain't de first scoop youse have got from me, is it?" inquired Larry the Bat querulously. "I asks youse again, did I ever hand youse a bum steer?"

"No," said Carruthers. "All right! I agree! You said to-morrow night. I take it, I'm to meet you some place?"

"Youse only needs one guess!" said Larry the Bat. "Dat's de idea. D'youse remember de time I called youse over de phone about a gazabo dat was tryin' to bust into de social columns of de papers wid a fake necklace dat he'd bought fer his wife?"

"You mean——"

"I mean de gazabo wid de fake necklace," cut in Larry the Bat sharply. "We ain't mentionin' no names ner places in public over de phone. De gazabo wot got tied to one of his own trees in his pajamas."

"Yes; I remember," said Carruthers crisply. "But I also remember that on that occasion your voice was—er—quite a lot more cultured and distinctly different from your voice to-night."

"I've grown older since den, an' me voice has changed," sniffed Larry the Bat. "Ferget it! Youse knows where de guy I'm talkin' about lived, don't youse?"

"Yes."

"Well, dat goes! Youse drives out dere in yer car to-morrow night, an' youse parks yer bus anywhere youse likes near de gates, an' den youse walks back along de road until youse gets de high sign. An' de time is nine o'clock. Prompt! See?"

"Look here," said Carruthers, "there's someone just as much interested in this as I am, and someone that I'll vouch for will play the game with you. I'd like to bring him along."

"Who's dat?" asked Larry the Bat suspiciously.

"A closer friend of Ray Thorne's than ever I was. His name is Jimmie Dale."

"T'hell wid him!" snapped Larry the Bat. "Youse comes alone, or youse don't come at all."

"Would you suggest," Carruthers laughed a little unpleasantly, "that I also made my will?"

"Youse can do wot youse damned likes!" snarled Larry the Bat. "If youse've got cold feet, get a hot-water bottle!"

"I will be there," said Carruthers coldly.

"At nine o'clock!"

"At nine o'clock."

"Alone!"

"Alone."

"Good-night!" said Larry the Bat.

"Good-night!" said Carruthers.