

## CHAPTER V

### DETECTIVE SERGEANT WAUD

As JIMMIE DALE reëntered the living room, he saw that Beaton had lifted a drawn face and was listening intently to the conversation that was taking place between the little knot of men near him, consisting of Carruthers, Sergeant Waud, and another plainclothesman. It was the latter who was speaking as Jimmie Dale joined the group:

“Sure! That’s the way he got in—the front basement window under the stoop. Jimmied it. That let him into a sort of storeroom. So far there’s nothing to show that he went anywhere else except right to the safe—but the boys are still digging around. Thorne was either lying awake or else he was wakened by some noise the maids didn’t hear—though, of course, they were on the floor above him. Anyway he was in bed, for, besides being found in pajamas, the bedclothes are flung back as though he had jumped up in a hurry. Then he came downstairs—and got plugged. But what gets me is why, if he was alarmed about anything, he didn’t take his service revolver with him. We found one loaded in the drawer of his highboy up there.”

Jimmie Dale’s brows were suddenly knotted as the recollection of a wartime incident flashed upon him. It might, or might not, be worth investigation; but, certainly, it could in no wise put the Gray Seal in jeop-

ardly—and furthest from his desires and intentions was the thought of keeping anything from the police that he could possibly avoid.

“Look here,” he said quickly, “I hope you won’t mind my interrupting, but there is something in connection with what has just been said that I think perhaps I should mention. I was at the front with Mr. Thorne, you know, and I remember that one night we found him walking around our billet—in his sleep.”

“The hell you say!” ejaculated Sergeant Waud sharply.

“I am not suggesting that this is what has happened here,” Jimmie Dale hastened to add, “for it would seem almost too fortuitous that he should be sleep-walking at exactly the psychological moment when the robbery was being committed; but it would at least explain why the maids heard nothing, as I understand from what this officer said was the case, and why Mr. Thorne not only came downstairs, but came down unarmed.”

Sergeant Waud swung abruptly around toward the valet in the chair.

“You, Beaton,” he demanded curtly, “since you have been with Mr. Thorne, have you ever known him to walk in his sleep?”

Beaton dragged his hand heavily across his eyes.

“No, sir,” he answered; “I haven’t.”

“H’m!” grunted Sergeant Waud; then to the detective beside him: “All right, Donnelly, bring the maids downstairs and put them in a room on the other side of the hall there. I’ll be ready to talk to them in a few minutes. Is there anyone else connected with the household?”

“No,” replied the other. “Just this man here and

the two women. They're mother and daughter—the mother's the cook, and the daughter's the housemaid."

Sergeant Waud jerked his head toward the door in dismissal, and, as the plainclothesman left the room, waved Carruthers and Jimmie Dale to chairs.

"You might as well sit down, gentlemen," he said. "I've got a few questions to ask you all, and I'll begin with you, Mr. Dale. When and where did you last see Mr. Thorne alive?"

"Last night at the St. James Club," said Jimmie Dale, as he seated himself. "Mr. Carruthers, Mr. Thorne, and I spent the evening there together until about eleven; then Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Thorne left the club together, and I stayed on for a few minutes to write a letter. Then I went home. The first I knew of anything having happened to Mr. Thorne was when Mr. Carruthers' telephone call woke me up."

"What time was that?"

Jimmie Dale took out his watch.

"I couldn't say exactly," he said. "Naturally, being in pajamas and having just got out of bed, I didn't have my watch; but I think we can check up with fair accuracy. I don't believe I was more than ten minutes dressing and getting here. I suppose I have been here fifteen minutes. That makes twenty-five. It is nearly half-past four now. I should say it was just around four o'clock when Mr. Carruthers telephoned me."

"Perhaps Mr. Carruthers can place the hour exactly?" suggested Sergeant Waud.

Carruthers shook his head.

"I'm sorry, if it's important," he said, "but, like Mr. Dale, I didn't look at my watch. I agree with him, though, that it must have been just about four o'clock;

however, the police ought to be able to confirm that, as I telephoned from here in their presence."

"So that, allowing you time to get over here, it was some fifteen or twenty minutes after you telephoned me before you telephoned Mr. Dale?"

"Yes; I should say so," Carruthers agreed.

Sergeant Waud studied the toe of his boot attentively for an instant.

"Well, no matter," he said finally. "Now, last evening, Mr. Dale, did you notice anything out of the ordinary in Mr. Thorne's behavior? Did he seem to be worried or to be laboring under any excitement?"

"On the contrary," Jimmie Dale declared emphatically. "I had never seen him in better spirits."

"Quite!" chimed in Carruthers.

Sergeant Waud nodded fretfully.

"I see!" he said. "Well, apart from just exactly *what* this Gray Seal killer was after in that safe, is there anything you know about Thorne's family and private life that would help any? What did you know about him in an intimate way?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid, in the sense you mean," said Jimmie Dale frankly. "He rarely, if ever, talked about himself. I know that he had traveled a great deal and had lived in all sorts of queer spots. I would describe him as a man of a distinctly adventurous spirit. As a matter of fact, travel off the beaten track and in out-of-the-way places was his hobby. He was not in business. He had independent means—inherited, I always understood. So far as I am aware, his only relative is a brother, John, living in Sydney, Australia. That's about all I know, and I doubt if Mr. Carruthers can add anything to it."

"No," said Carruthers; "that covers everything I know, too."

"All right!" Sergeant Waud frowned. "Now, your story, Mr. Carruthers."

"I left Mr. Thorne at the door of the club," stated Carruthers. "It was then, as Mr. Dale has said, about eleven o'clock. Mr. Thorne took a taxi, and I heard him give the driver this address, so I presume he went directly home. I went down to the newspaper office. I got home about two and went to bed. The telephone woke me up. It was Beaton there who told me that Mr. Thorne had been murdered. Beaton said he had telephoned the police. I immediately telephoned you and then I came right over here. The police had already arrived. I telephoned Mr. Dale from here, as I have already said. That's all."

As Carruthers ended the terse recital of his movements, Jimmie Dale shifted his chair slightly. Unostentatiously, he had been watching Beaton, and now Sergeant Waud had stepped almost between them. The valet wasn't a pleasant sight. His hair was disheveled, and his bloodshot eyes kept searching about the room now like a hunted animal's; also the man's hands shook and his lips twitched perceptibly—probably as the result of his recent debauch. And now, as Sergeant Waud addressed him, he circled his lips feverishly with the tip of his tongue.

"You, now, Beaton!" said Sergeant Waud, all trace of smoothness gone suddenly from his voice. "I understand you've been painting the town."

"It was my night out," muttered Beaton sullenly.

"Yes!" agreed Sergeant Waud caustically. "It looks like it! Where'd you spend it?"

"In a night club. The White Caldron, if you want to know."

"Nice dump! Where else?"

"Nowhere else. I—I got soused there. I was pretty drunk—damned drunk, if you want the truth. I had to be brought home."

"Yeh?" Sergeant Waud's jaw shot out truculently. "Well, you don't seem so damned drunk now? For a jag like that, you've got over it quick! Some fast worker, ain't you?"

Beaton's hand went shakily through his hair.

"Maybe if you'd seen what I saw here, and come on it suddenly, you'd have sobered up too," he answered.

"Yeh?" inquired Sergeant Waud, with a chilly smile. "Well, we'll hear about that in a minute. Who brought you home?"

"Two of the girls in a taxi. They opened the door for me."

"Which door?"

"The basement door under the stoop. I don't use the front door."

"Right alongside the window that was jimmied!" Sergeant Waud was purring his words now. "But, of course, you were too drunk to notice it. And the two dames didn't, neither! Ain't that too bad!"

"It's the truth anyhow," declared Beaton, as his hand went through his hair again. "I don't know what you're driving at. You—you don't suspect me, do you?"

"You bet your life I do!" snapped Sergeant Waud. "I suspect every man in New York—except myself. I'm the only one I know that *ain't* this Gray Seal guy! So you didn't see anything wrong with the window?"

"No, I didn't," replied Beaton. "And what's more,

if the window was jimmied, that let's me out. I had a key. What would I want to force the window for?"

Sergeant Waud's eyes narrowed and held on the man in the chair.

"Well, it wouldn't have been a bad idea, would it?" he asked softly.

Beaton came suddenly up from his chair, his face working, his fists clenched.

"Damn you!" he burst out hoarsely. "You're riding me good and hard, aren't you? You've all of you had it in for me ever since you got here. You and your bright-eyed detectives don't know where you're at! That's what's the matter. You're running around in circles like a lot of puppy dogs chasing their tails. Only you've got to justify your jobs, eh? But I'm not going to be the goat just because I was full! I won't stand for——"

"Close your map!" Sergeant Waud took a step forward and pushed Beaton unceremoniously back into his chair. "You spill any more of that sort of stuff and I'll ride you plenty! You've got a lot of explaining yet to do, my bucko! Did those two dolls come into the house with you?"

Beaton was still defiant.

"No," he said sourly.

"What did they do?"

"They drove off in the taxi."

"All right. Now tell us what *you* did."

"I came upstairs, and"—Beaton nodded jerkily in the direction of the smaller room—"and found him in there, and——"

"Wait a minute!" interposed Sergeant Waud gruffly. "I want to get this straight. You mean that when you

got up here the door of that room leading into the hall was open, the room was lighted, and you could see Mr. Thorne lying on the floor?"

"No; I don't!" exclaimed Beaton viciously. "What are you trying to put words into my mouth for? There wasn't any light, and I didn't see in. If there had been a light, I'd have thought Mr. Thorne was in there reading or something, and I would have steered clear so that he wouldn't see me in the condition I was in. I had enough of my senses left for that."

"So, then, when you got up on this floor everything was in darkness."

"Yes."

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"What made you think anything was wrong?"

"I didn't think anything was wrong."

"Perhaps you'll tell us, then"—Sergeant Waud's voice grew suddenly silky again—"why you went into that room?"

Beaton swallowed hard.

"I'm not proud of it," he said. "I wanted another drink. Mr. Thorne's got a liqueur stand in there as you've probably seen. That's why."

"I'm thinking of getting a valët myself, and I'd like to hire you," said Sergeant Waud evenly. "Go on! What happened then?"

"I went into the room, and"—Beaton was twisting his hands nervously together once more—"and I stumbled over something soft on the floor in the dark. I couldn't see, but, drunk as I was, the *feel* of it gave me a scare. I turned on the light, and the shock of what



I saw drove the booze out of me. I was as weak as a kitten. I remember hanging onto the desk. I saw what you've seen. The room was just like it is now."

"What did you do then?" demanded Sergeant Waud.

"I telephoned police headquarters, then I telephoned Mr. Carruthers, and then I went upstairs and told Mrs. Caton and her daughter to get dressed, that Mr. Thorpe had been killed."

"Any reason why you telephoned Mr. Carruthers rather than Mr. Dale?"

"Yes. I knew there'd be a lot of publicity, and, Mr. Carruthers being a newspaperman, I thought he'd know what ought to be done about it better than Mr. Dale would. I didn't call up Mr. Dale because I knew Mr. Carruthers would do that."

"How long was it after you turned on the light in that room before you telephoned headquarters?"

Beaton shook his head.

"I don't know. It might have been one minute or it might have been twenty for all I knew. I was hanging onto the desk there as I told you. It was like I'd been stunned. I couldn't think straight at first. I couldn't think at all."

"Got any idea what time all this happened?"

"Yes," said Beaton slowly, "I can answer that. At least, I know what time it was when I got here in the taxi."

"Oh, you do!" Sergeant Waud eyed the other in cold speculation. "Drunk and all, eh? And what time was that?"

"I don't like you!" snarled Beaton defiantly. "Yes, drunk and all; I know that, and that's the only reason I do know it. It was twenty-five minutes of four."

"Tell us how?" invited Sergeant Waud icily.

"Oh, all right," said Beaton, after an instant's morose silence. "When the taxi stopped in front of the door, I was fumbling around in my pockets to give the girls some money to pay for the taxi after it had taken them home. I was so drunk that every time I'd coughed up at the night club I'd been putting whatever cash I got back all over the lot. I found some bills crammed into my watch pocket. When I pulled them out, the watch came with them and dangled down on the end of my chain. One of the girls lifted it up to put it back in my pocket, and I asked her what time it was. She took her cigarette lighter so as to see. She said it was twenty-five minutes to four."

Sergeant Waud turned abruptly to one of two other plainclothesmen who had entered the room a few minutes previously.

"Logan," he said curtly, "ring up police headquarters and find out what time Beaton's call came in."

The man nodded and left the room.

Sergeant Waud turned to Beaton again.

"Now let's see," he said almost suavely. "How long have you been in Mr. Thorne's employ?"

"Nearly a year."

"You were pretty well acquainted with his habits, then?"

"I suppose so."

"Sure! Well, now, about that safe? You've seen him open it a good many times, haven't you?"

"Yes. Often."

"Was it his habit to keep, say, a large sum of money there?"

"No, it wasn't," said Beaton decisively. "I'm sure he

didn't, because I know he never kept much money about him at any time. And the reason I know that is because he used to draw checks in small amounts quite frequently and send me to the bank to cash them."

"Anything else, then, of particular value, that he kept there?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, *somebody* was after *something*. Ever hear Mr. Thorne say anything that would give you an idea as to what it might be?"

"No."

"That's too bad! It's going to be pretty hard to check up what's missing," mused Sergeant Waud regretfully; then blandly: "How long were you with Mr. Thorne, Beaton, before he trusted you with the combination?"

Beaton smiled pityingly.

"Try next door," he suggested. "You draw a blank!"

"Oh, that's all right," returned Sergeant Waud composedly. "Bound to miss sometimes, you know. The safe was opened *on* the combination, but the key of that little drawer evidently wasn't handy. Do you know where Mr. Thorne kept the key?"

"I can't say—unless it was on his key chain."

"And, of course, Mr. Thorne couldn't be asked for it in the dead of night," observed Sergeant Waud pleasantly. "I'd very much like to know what was in that drawer. You said you've often seen the safe open, but have you ever seen inside that drawer? Did Mr. Thorne ever open it in your presence?"

Outwardly unmoved, inwardly Jimmie Dale smiled grimly as Beaton sat for a moment in silence with his brows pulled together. He, Jimmie Dale, couldn't volunteer the information, could he, that there had

been a certain blue envelope in the drawer, which envelope at the present moment was reposing in *his* safe?

"*Well?*" Sergeant Waud's voice sharpened, the single word was brittle and imperative.

"Damn it!" exploded Beaton. "Cut it out, can't you? I'm doing my best to answer you. I was trying to think. I certainly never saw inside that drawer, and I'm positive now that Mr. Thorne never opened it when I was around."

"Keep your temper," growled Sergeant Waud; "I'm keeping mine, and—ah, Logan!"—as the plainclothesman came back into the room. "What do they say down at headquarters?"

"Beaton's call was received there at three thirty-nine," Logan replied.

"H'm!" Sergeant Waud pulled at his lower lip. "That's four minutes after Beaton got here in the taxi. H'm!" he muttered again; then suddenly: "Let's see your watch, Beaton!"

Beaton, without comment, handed his watch to Sergeant Waud.

Sergeant Waud took his own watch from his pocket and compared the two.

"Well, I guess this lets you out all right," he said with a note of gruff friendliness in his voice as he returned the watch. "No man, drunk or sober, could have entered the house, cut the lock out of that steel drawer, shot Thorne, and telephoned police headquarters all inside of four minutes. I've been a bit rough with you, Beaton, but that's what you get for booze-fighting. You're not going to show up any too well over to-night's work as it is, but you're lucky to get off so easily. No bad feelings, eh?"

Beaton's hands clenched.

"You go to hell!" he said relentlessly.

Sergeant Waud shrugged his shoulders.

"Atta boy! Nurse it!" he grinned; then to Logan: "Ask Donnelly to bring the two maids in—and you can take Beaton along with you and get the names of those two dolls he was with. Then get hold of them and see if the stories fit. I guess it's all right, for he wouldn't have been fool enough to spill it if it wasn't—but check it up anyway. See?"

"Sure!" said Logan—and, followed by Beaton, left the room.

A moment later the two maids entered. Jimmie Dale nodded to them sympathetically. He knew them both through his frequent visits to the house, and liked them. Both had been crying, both were frightened and in an obviously overwrought state of nerves.

"I want to ask you a few questions," said Sergeant Waud reassuringly. "What are your names?"

"I am Mrs. Caton," the elder answered; "and this is my daughter. Her name is Netta."

"Well, Mrs. Caton, did you or your daughter go out last evening?"

"No, sir; neither of us did."

"So you were both in the house when Mr. Thorne returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time was it when he got in?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I didn't hear him come in, and Netta says she didn't either. You see, we both sleep in the same room and had gone to bed before he came in. We went to bed about half-past ten."

"And I understand that neither of you heard anything

that would account for Mr. Thorne getting out of bed and going downstairs?"

"No, sir; not a thing."

"Did you know that Mr. Thorne walked in his sleep?"

Mrs. Caton gave a gasp of surprise.

"Did he, sir?" she asked incredulously.

Sergeant Waud frowned.

"That's what I want to know. I'm asking you whether or not you ever knew him to do such a thing?"

Mrs. Caton shook her head unequivocally.

"Good Lord, sir, no, never to my knowledge!" she exclaimed. "And I've been with him ever since he got back from the war—and so's Netta."

"H'm!" grunted Sergeant Waud. "Well, then, when did you first know that anything had happened here?"

"When Mr. Beaton knocked on the door of our room and told us Mr. Thorne had been killed."

"And up to that time you say you did not hear a sound of any description?"

"No, sir; not a sound."

Again Sergeant Waud frowned.

"That's very strange!" he said a little sharply.

"There was a shot fired in that room—the shot that killed Mr. Thorne. You should have heard that."

Mrs. Caton bridled slightly.

"Well, if you say I should, sir, maybe I should," she answered. "Only I didn't! And Netta says——"

"Never mind telling me what Netta says!" Sergeant Waud interrupted in sudden impatience. "Netta can speak for herself. Well, Netta?"

Netta, evidently under the impression that her mother's veracity was being impugned, tossed her head.

"It's just as Mother says," she replied tartly. "I didn't hear anything at all until Mr. Beaton woke us up."

"All right!" said Sergeant Waud gruffly; then to Mrs. Caton again: "What did you do after Beaton woke you up?"

"We got dressed and I came downstairs—I wouldn't let Netta come. I came in here. Mr. Beaton had turned on the lights, and he told me that he had sent for the police. I didn't go into that other room. I—I couldn't. I just looked in. Then I went back upstairs to our room and stayed with Netta until the police came."

Sergeant Waud rubbed his chin reflectively with his thumb and forefinger for a moment; then he lunged swiftly:

"Mrs. Caton, what was it Mr. Thorne kept in his safe that the thief was after?"

Mrs. Caton flushed angrily.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said stiffly. "I've no more idea what he kept there than you have—far less, indeed, as I suppose you've been rummaging around in it ever since you got here!"

"Sorry!" Sergeant Waud smiled disarmingly. "No offense meant. I only thought that as one of the household you might at one time or another have heard Mr. Thorne drop a word or two, say, or have seen something yourself that would give us a lead."

Mrs. Caton was not altogether appeased.

"Well, I didn't!" she said thinly.

"And I didn't, either," asserted Netta combatively; "so you needn't ask me!"

"All right," said Sergeant Waud—and waved his hand in dismissal toward the door. "That'll be all for now."

You can go back to your room." And then, as the two women left the room, he faced Carruthers and Jimmie Dale with a grim smile. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "that's the end of the first round. What do you think of it?"

It was Carruthers who answered.

"It's all the Gray Seal's as usual," he flung out bitterly; "but the bout isn't ended yet—and this time it's going to end in a different way than it has ever ended before! This is going to be the Gray Seal's last fight!"

Jimmie Dale made no comment.

Sergeant Waud thrust out his jaw pugnaciously.

"You said it!" he growled.

Daylight had broken when Jimmie Dale returned to his home. He dismissed Benson, let himself into the house, and, going immediately to his den, locked the door behind him.

All that had transpired, all of Sergeant Waud's questionings, except that perhaps by the process of elimination they had established certain negative facts, had been futile. A queer, grim smile crept to the corners of Jimmie Dale's mouth. Necessarily so! The clue to the crime wasn't at the scene of the crime, it wasn't at Ray's house—it was here in this room, in that barrel-shaped safe in the alcove.

The blue envelope!

He stepped swiftly over to the safe, opened it, took out the envelope, and, crossing the room, sat down at his desk. Here was the answer, here was the solution of the crime; and, since he could not turn it over to the police, the very possession of the envelope laid him under an irrefutable moral obligation to go through to the



end with it all himself. The Gray Seal was doubly launched into the old life again! What made him think of that? He pushed his hand through his hair. What did that matter? It didn't bring any added or needed urge. He had seen Ray dead there on the floor of that little room! And the world was saying now that the Gray Seal was the murderer!

Jimmie Dale's dark eyes narrowed and his lips drew into a thin, straight line. Well, they wouldn't say it long! Nor, with the key to the mystery here in his hand, would the task he had set himself prove very hard!

He picked up a paper knife from the desk and carefully slit open the end of the sealed and unaddressed envelope. From within he removed a folded sheet of thin, blue, foreign notepaper—and then for a long time Jimmie Dale sat there with a stunned look upon his face.

All that the envelope had contained was a blank piece of paper.