

# The Adventures of Jimmie Dale

By

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## I.1. The Gray Seal

Among New York's fashionable and ultra-exclusive clubs, the St. James stood an acknowledged leader--more men, perhaps, cast an envious eye at its portals, of modest and unassuming taste, as they passed by on Fifth Avenue, than they did at any other club upon the long list that the city boasts. True, there were more expensive clubs upon whose membership roll scintillated more stars of New York's social set, but the St. James was distinctive. It guaranteed a man, so to speak--that is, it guaranteed a man to be innately a gentleman. It required money, it is true, to keep up one's membership, but there were many members who were not wealthy, as wealth is measured nowadays--there were many, even, who were pressed sometimes to meet their dues and their house accounts, but the accounts were invariably promptly paid. No man, once in, could ever afford, or ever had the desire, to resign from the St. James Club. Its membership was cosmopolitan; men of every walk in life passed in and out of its doors, professional men and business men, physicians, artists, merchants, authors, engineers, each stamped with the "hall mark" of the St. James, an innate gentleman. To receive a two weeks' out-of-town visitor's card to the St. James was something to speak about, and men from Chicago, St. Louis, or San Francisco spoke of it with a sort of holier-than-thou air to fellow members of their own exclusive clubs, at home again.

Is there any doubt that Jimmie Dale was a gentleman--an INNATE gentleman? Jimmie Dale's father had been a member of the St. James Club, and one of the largest safe manufacturers of the United States, a prosperous, wealthy man, and at Jimmie Dale's birth he had proposed his son's name for membership. It took some time to get into the St. James; there was a long waiting list that neither money, influence, nor pull could alter by so much as one iota. Men proposed their sons' names for membership when they were born as religiously as they entered them upon the city's birth register. At twenty-one Jimmie Dale was elected to membership; and, incidentally, that same year, graduated from Harvard. It was Mr. Dale's desire that his son should enter the business and learn

it from the ground up, and Jimmie Dale, for four years thereafter, had followed his father's wishes. Then his father died. Jimmie Dale had leanings toward more artistic pursuits than business. He was credited with sketching a little, writing a little; and he was credited with having received a very snug amount from the combine to which he sold out his safe-manufacturing interests. He lived a bachelor life--his mother had been dead many years--in the house that his father had left him on Riverside Drive, kept a car or two and enough servants to run his menage smoothly, and serve a dinner exquisitely when he felt hospitably inclined.

Could there be any doubt that Jimmie Dale was innately a gentleman?

It was evening, and Jimmie Dale sat at a small table in the corner of the St. James Club dining room. Opposite him sat Herman Carruthers, a young man of his own age, about twenty-six, a leading figure in the newspaper world, whose rise from reporter to managing editor of the morning NEWS-ARGUS within the short space of a few years had been almost meteoric.

They were at coffee and cigars, and Jimmie Dale was leaning back in his chair, his dark eyes fixed interestedly on his guest.

Carruthers, intently engaged in trimming his cigar ash on the edge of the Limoges china saucer of his coffee set, looked up with an abrupt laugh.

"No; I wouldn't care to go on record as being an advocate of crime," he said whimsically; "that would never do. But I don't mind admitting quite privately that it's been a positive regret to me that he has gone."

"Made too good 'copy' to lose, I suppose?" suggested Jimmie Dale quizzically. "Too bad, too, after working up a theatrical name like that for him--the Gray Seal--rather unique! Who stuck that on him-- you?"

Carruthers laughed--then, grown serious, leaned toward Jimmie Dale.

"You don't mean to say, Jimmie, that you don't know about that, do you?" he asked incredulously. "Why, up to a year ago the papers were full of him."

"I never read your beastly agony columns," said Jimmie Dale, with a cheery grin.

"Well," said Carruthers, "you must have skipped everything but the stock reports then."

"Granted," said Jimmie Dale. "So go on, Carruthers, and tell me about him--I dare say I may have heard of him, since you are so distressed about it, but my memory isn't good enough to contradict anything you may have to say about the estimable gentleman, so you're safe."

Carruthers reverted to the Limoges saucer and the tip of his cigar.

"He was the most puzzling, bewildering, delightful crook in the annals of crime," said Carruthers reminiscently, after a moment's silence. "Jimmie, he was the king-pin of them all. Clever isn't the word for him, or dare-devil isn't either. I used to think sometimes his motive was more than half for the pure deviltry of it, to laugh at the police and pull the noses of the rest of us that were after him. I used to dream nights about those confounded gray seals of his--that's where he got his name; he left every job he ever did with a little gray paper affair, fashioned diamond-shaped, stuck somewhere where it would be the first thing your eyes would light upon when you reached the scene, and--"

"Don't go so fast," smiled Jimmie Dale. "I don't quite get the connection. What did you have to do with this--er--Gray Seal fellow? Where do you come in?"

"I? I had a good deal to do with him," said Carruthers grimly. "I was a reporter when he first broke loose, and the ambition of my life, after I began really to appreciate what he was, was to get him--and I nearly did, half a dozen times, only--"

"Only you never quite did, eh?" cut in Jimmie Dale slyly. "How near did you get, old man? Come on, now, no bluffing; did the Gray Seal ever even recognise you as a factor in the hare-and-hound game?"

"You're flicking on the raw, Jimmie," Carruthers answered, with a wry grimace. "He knew me, all right, confound him! He favoured me with several sarcastic notes--I'll show 'em to you some day-- explaining how I'd fallen down and how I could have got him if I'd done something else." Carruthers' fist came suddenly down on the table. "And I would have got him, too, if he had lived."

"Lived!" ejaculated Jimmie Dale. "He's dead, then?"

"Yes," averted Carruthers; "he's dead."

"H'm!" said Jimmie Dale facetiously. "I hope the size of the wreath you sent was an adequate tribute of your appreciation."

"I never sent any wreath," returned Carruthers, "for the very simple reason that I didn't know where to send it, or when he died. I said he was dead because for over a year now he hasn't lifted a finger."

"Rotten poor evidence, even for a newspaper," commented Jimmie Dale. "Why not give him credit for having, say--reformed?"

Carruthers shook his head. "You don't get it at all, Jimmie," he said earnestly. "The Gray Seal wasn't an ordinary crook--he was a classic. He was an artist, and the art of the thing was in his blood. A man like that could no more stop than he could stop breathing--and live. He's dead; there's nothing to it but that-- he's dead. I'd bet a year's salary on it."

"Another good man gone wrong, then," said Jimmie Dale capriciously. "I suppose, though, that at least you discovered the 'woman in the case'?"

Carruthers looked up quickly, a little startled; then laughed shortly.

"What's the matter?" inquired Jimmie Dale.

"Nothing," said Carruthers. "You kind of got me for a moment, that's all. That's the way those infernal notes from the Gray Seal used to end up: 'Find the lady, old chap; and you'll get me.' He had a damned patronising familiarity that would make you squirm."

"Poor old Carruthers!" grinned Jimmie Dale. "You did take it to heart, didn't you?"

"I'd have sold my soul to get him--and so would you, if you had been in my boots," said Carruthers, biting nervously at the end of his cigar.

"And been sorry for it afterward," supplied Jimmie Dale.

"Yes, by Jove, you're right!" admitted Carruthers, "I suppose I should. I actually got to love the fellow--it was the GAME, really, that I wanted to beat."

"Well, and how about this woman? Keep on the straight and narrow path, old man," prodded Jimmie Dale.

"The woman?" Carruthers smiled. "Nothing doing! I don't believe there was one--he wouldn't have been likely to egg the police and reporters on to finding her if there had been, would he? It was a blind, of course. He worked alone, absolutely alone. That's the secret of his success, according to my way of thinking. There was never so much as an indication that he had had an accomplice in anything he ever did."

Jimmie Dale's eyes travelled around the club's homelike, perfectly appointed room. He nodded to a fellow member here and there, then his eyes rested musingly on his guest again.

Carruthers was staring thoughtfully at his coffee cup.

"He was the prince of crooks and the father of originality," announced Carruthers abruptly, following the pause that had ensued. "Half the time there wasn't any more getting at the motive for the curious things he did, than there was getting at the Gray Seal himself."

"Carruthers," said Jimmy Dale, with a quick little nod of approval, "you're positively interesting to-night. But, so far, you've been kind of scouting around the outside edges without getting into the thick of it. Let's have some of your experiences with the Gray Seal in detail; they ought to make ripping fine yarns."

"Not to-night, Jimmie," said Carruthers; "it would take too long." He pulled out his watch mechanically as he spoke, glanced at it--and pushed back his chair. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "It's nearly half-past nine. I'd no idea we had lingered so long over dinner. I'll have to hurry; we're a morning paper, you know, Jimmie."

"What! Really! Is it as late as that." Jimmie Dale rose from his chair as Carruthers stood up. "Well, if you must--"

"I must," said Carruthers, with a laugh.

"All right, O slave." Jimmie Dale laughed back--and slipped his hand, a trick of their old college days together, through Carruthers' arm as they left the room.

He accompanied Carruthers downstairs to the door of the club, and saw his guest into a taxi; then he returned inside, sauntered through the billiard room, and from there into one of the cardrooms, where, pressed into a game, he played several rubbers of bridge before going home.

It was, therefore, well on toward midnight when Jimmie Dale arrived at his house on Riverside Drive, and was admitted by an elderly manservant.

"Hello, Jason," said Jimmie Dale pleasantly. "You still up!"

"Yes, sir," replied Jason, who had been valet to Jimmie Dale's father before him. "I was going to bed, sir, at about ten o'clock, when a messenger came with a letter. Begging your pardon, sir, a young lady, and--"

"Jason"--Jimmie Dale flung out the interruption, sudden, quick, imperative--"what did she look like?"

"Why--why, I don't exactly know as I could describe her, sir," stammered Jason, taken aback. "Very ladylike, sir, in her dress and appearance, and what I would call, sir, a beautiful face."

"Hair and eyes--what color?" demanded Jimmie Dale crisply. "Nose, lips, chin--what shape?"

"Why, sir," gasped Jason, staring at his master, "I--I don't rightly know. I wouldn't call her fair or dark, something between. I didn't take particular notice, and it wasn't overlit outside the door."

"It's too bad you weren't a younger man, Jason," commented Jimmie Dale, with a curious tinge of bitterness in his voice. "I'd have given a year's income for your opportunity to-night, Jason."

"Yes, sir," said Jason helplessly.

"Well, go on," prompted Jimmie Dale. "You told her I wasn't home, and she said she knew it, didn't she? And she left the letter that I was on no account to miss receiving when I got back, though there was no need of telephoning me to the club--when I returned would do, but it was imperative that I should have it then--eh?"

"Good Lord, sir!" ejaculated Jason, his jaw dropped, that's exactly what she did say."

"Jason," said Jimmie Dale grimly, "listen to me. If ever she comes here again, inveigle her in. If you can't inveigle her, use force; capture her, pull her in, do anything--do anything, do you hear? Only don't let her get away from you until I've come."

Jason gazed at his master as though the other had lost his reason.

"Use force, sir?" he repeated weakly--and shook his head. "You--you can't mean that, sir."

"Can't I?" inquired Jimmie Dale, with a mirthless smile. "I mean every word of it, Jason--and if I thought there was the slightest chance of her giving you the opportunity, I'd be more imperative still. As it is--where's the letter?"

"On the table in your studio, sir," said Jason, mechanically.

Jimmie Dale started toward the stairs--then turned and came back to where Jason, still shaking his head heavily, had been gazing anxiously after his master. Jimmie Dale laid his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Jason," he said kindly, with a swift change of mood, "you've been a long time in the family--first with father, and now with me. You'd do a good deal for me, wouldn't you?"

"I'd do anything in the world for you, Master Jim," said the old man earnestly.

"Well, then, remember this," said Jimmie Dale slowly, looking into the other's eyes, "remember this--keep your mouth shut and your eyes open. It's my fault. I should have warned you long ago, but I never dreamed that she would ever come here herself. There have been times when it was practically a matter of life and death to me to know who that woman is that you saw to-night. That's all, Jason. Now go to bed."

"Master Jim," said the old man simply, "thank you, sir, thank you for trusting me. I've dandled you on my knee when you were a baby, Master Jim. I don't know what it's about, and it isn't for me to ask. I thought, sir, that maybe you were having a little fun with me. But I know now, and you can trust me, Master Jim, if she ever comes again."

"Thank you, Jason," said Jimmie Dale, his hand closing with an appreciative pressure on the other's shoulder "Good-night, Jason."

Upstairs on the first landing, Jimmie Dale opened a door, closed and locked it behind him--and the electric switch clicked under his fingers. A glow fell softly from a cluster of shaded ceiling lights. It was a large room, a very large room,

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