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DEATH TAKES THE WHEEL

First of a New Series-a Complete Novelet
By G. WAYMAN JONES

The Return Of

DEATH TAKES THE WHEEL

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By G. Wayman Jones

Author of "The Murder Club," "Hell's Mansion," etc.



"I'll take that money, Krendall!"

Mr. Death snarled

CHAPTER I

ALIAS MR. DEATH

THE delicate, filigreed hands on the clock pointed to exactly three minutes to twelve.

The clock was just a shade too ornamental for good taste. So were the other furnishings in Raul Krendall's den—and so, for that matter was Raul Krendall himself, with his too-perfect attire and his impeccable manners. Not that he didn't manage to move in the best circles in Newkirk City. He was entertaining a group tonight.

From the other side of the door came sounds of laughter and the music of an expensive orchestra. Some of the more thoughtful of the guests out there might have wondered how Raul Krendall could afford all this, since he had no visible means of support. Inside the den, Mrs. Robert Carson was finding out the secret of this.

She wasn't enjoying it. She was trembling all over, her blue eyes clouded with despair and loathing as she brought a roll of bills out of her purse and handed them across the table to Raul Krendall, who was smiling cynically.

When Crime and Corruption Scourge a

Alias Mr. Death



“I thought I killed this guy once, and here he is, asking for more!” Bakrum snarled

“That’s all—all I could possibly get together. Won’t you—” her throaty voice broke—“won’t you give me back my letters now? Won’t you please let me have every one of them?”

Krendall’s long fingers leafed through the bills. “When you bring me the rest of the ten thousand, then you may have your letters back. You have my word of honor—”

Paula Carson laughed bitterly. “The honor of a blackmailer! Just because when I was a romantic schoolgirl I wrote some foolish letters to a matinee idol—”

“Of course,” Krendall said soothingly. “But after all, your husband is inclined to be hot-

tempered and he’s just out of the hospital. I thought that it would be very bad for him to be disturbed—considering his condition—so when I heard about these letters I came directly to you....”

The young woman made a hopeless gesture. “Oh, if I only had someone to turn to—”

Behind her, the door of the den opened, letting in a burst of music. Paula Carson turned around, with a quick intake of breath that was almost a prayer.

Then her shoulders slumped as she saw who it was. It was only Jimmy Gilmore.

Raul Krendall read her thoughts and spoke them, but in a voice so low that it reached her ears

City, Jimmy Gilmore Battles for Justice!

alone.

"*He* can't help you. *He* couldn't help anybody. It's just Jimmy Gilmore!"

PHYSICALLY, James Quincy Gilmore deserved more complimentary comment than that. He looked very much a man. Six feet tall, perfectly proportioned, he moved with an ease and grace that bespoke the superb coordination of mind and muscle. His face too was good-looking, with strong features and clear brown eyes.

The only mark on him seemed to be a scar that angled up from his left eyebrow, to be lost in his spiky brown hair.

According to his socialite friends and those others who knew him in Newkirk City, he was just a playboy, with too much money and too much looks. There was no denying his charm, and being a Gilmore his blue blood coursed thickly through him.

Now Jimmy Gilmore stood in the doorway, a surprised expression on his face, as if he hadn't expected to see anyone.

He let his eyes wander around the den until they came to rest on the ornate clock.

"Midnight!" he said. "The time for dark deeds and foul spirits to be abroad—and all that rot you read about. Personally, I never believed it. Sorry—" he waved a hand at the man and woman—"guess I'll be going."

The door closed behind him. Neither of the two people in the den had noticed one peculiar thing. Perhaps they had been too far away; or more likely they hadn't considered Jimmy Gilmore important enough to study closely.

As a result they hadn't noticed a change come over the scar on Jimmy's forehead. Usually it was almost invisible under his tan. When he had stepped into the den it had begun to glow redly, like a tiny, jagged streak of red lightning across his forehead.

That happened only when the usually calm James Quincy Gilmore, the rich idler, knew rage to his deepest depths, felt anger roaring with tidal force through his veins.

The scar registered only when he was in the presence of a despicable injustice.

It was a few minutes after three by Raul Krendall's clock when the last of his guests had gone. A leer of triumph split Krendall's thin face

as he went to the wall back of his desk and removed an etching of an English countryside. He pressed a button, hidden in the wall moulding, and a panel swung back. Behind it was a small chrome steel safe.

Krendall's air of self-satisfaction deepened as he opened the safe and prepared to deposit therein the money he had taken from Mrs. Carson.

Suddenly the door opened—the same door that had admitted playboy Jimmy Gilmore earlier in the evening. But this time the figure on the threshold was very different. About the same size and build—yes. But there the resemblance ended. The man in the doorway was purposeful, grim, dynamic. Dressed all in black, even to black gloves and a black mask, he radiated a grim purpose that made Raul Krendall cower against the wall.

Slowly, deliberately, the sable visitor closed the door behind him. His eyes burned through the slits in his mask. His voice was clipped and cold.

"I'll take that money, Krendall. Also Mrs. Carson's letters and all the rest of the blackmail stuff you have in that safe!"

"My God!" Raul Krendall's voice was a hollow croak. "Who are you?"

"Look at me, Krendall," the clipped voice directed. "Look at me and think back. Whom do I resemble? Oh, no man you ever saw. But a man you no doubt heard about, eh, Krendall? This black cloak, this black mask—"

"No!" Krendall cried hoarsely. "No, it can't be! It can't—"

"Yes, Krendall—I am that man—I am . . . 'Alias Mr. Death'."

WITH these words the man in black moved fast across the den toward his terror-stricken host. His black shoes made no sound on the soft rug.

"But you're supposed to be dead," Krendall babbled, his face the color of chalk. "You crashed in a plane—"

"So I did," the clipped voice cut in coldly, "but I've come back. I've come back to deal with rats like you. I've been away too long, and in my absence Newkirk City has grown foul again. And because the police as well as the rats themselves thought me dead, I had a strategic advantage in this particular clean-up job.

"I have other advantages, too, Krendall. I am a wanted man—wanted because I took the law into my own hands when the official law was too corrupt to deal with the crime that sapped at this city's vitals. But precisely because of that, I haven't a thing to lose, and a man who has nothing to lose can take the chances another man can't take."

Raul Krendall's face was completely drained of color. He struggled to control himself as his visitor moved slowly forward, with that soundless, cat-like tread. Krendall was a rat, but he had some degree of cunning and desperation.

In the wall niche above the safe was a hidden set-in gun. One of Raul Krendall's cute little ideas. It was trained on a spot at the left side of his desk where visitors usually sat. It was operated by a button on the leg of his desk.

Krendall wrestled a placating expression onto his face. If he could only stall for a moment or two longer, his unwelcome guest would come in line with the set gun.

"Don't be too hard on me," Raul Krendall whined. He moved closer to his desk and his foot moved toward the button. "I don't do this blackmailing because I like to. I have to do it. The boss makes me."

"Granted!" the answer was sharp. "Granted that you don't have sense enough to plan all this. You're just a hired man. Tell me who your boss is and I'll likely let you off easy."

Krendall trembled in anticipation. One step more and he could press the button. His voice sank to a strained whisper.

"You've got to promise to protect me if I tell you. My life wouldn't be worth a lead nickel if I—"

His words were cut off by the sudden, loud roar of the gun. And the masked figure was apparently hit, he was down, he was rolling on the rug.

A snarl of triumph broke from Raul Krendall. His hand snaked into a top drawer of the desk, came out with another revolver. He lifted it to line on the rolling figure, just to make sure.

But one thing Raul Krendall had missed in his eagerness and excitement. He could not be blamed for that—it had been a movement too quick for any pair of human eyes to follow.

Mr. Death had seen Krendall's leg stiffen as it reached for the button. He had been warned at the crucial instant by the instinctive squinting of Krendall's eyes.

Consequently, the bullet had ploughed through the space where he had been standing a fraction of a second before. It made a neat round hole in the cream-tinted plaster on the opposite wall.

Still rolling, the masked figure slid a revolver expertly from under his black coat. He shot just as Krendall gritted: "This will finish you!"

Raul Krendall's hand jerked up. His revolver blazed up into the ceiling. The blackmailer stood for a moment, with a third eye showing exactly between the other two. Just where the thin eyebrows met over the nose. Then he wilted down behind his desk.

Mr. Death shook his head. He had not wanted to kill. He had been forced to do so. He slid the gun back into its shoulder holster and reached the safe by the time alarmed voices of servants came from the rear of the house. He worked fast. In a minute he had the safe cleaned out and was ready to leave.

Only one memento of his visit remained after he had gone, except, of course, the body of the late lamented Mr. Raul Krendall. This little memento lay beside the blackmailer's corpse.

It was a small thing, hardly enough to set all of Newkirk City in an uproar; to put the police and underworld alike in a state of nervous, fear-ridden jitters. Yet that is exactly what it did.

Just a small, white card, like a calling card. In fact, it was a personal card. The name on it was:

Alias Mr. Death.

CHAPTER II

THE SHARER OF THE SECRET



MR. DEATH was a killer in the sight of God and man. But James Quincy Gilmore—Jimmy Gilmore—was a killer in the sight of God and only one girl. That girl was Sally Fortune, and it was to Sally Fortune that he went in the small hours of that morning.



Alias Mr. Death

In the swift seconds before ringing her bell, as he stood before the door of her apartment, he remembered the time he had come back to her, after his reputed fiery death in that airplane. He remembered how she had cried and laughed, and how at last, devouring him with her eyes, she had said:

“Mr. Death is dead—it’s Jimmy Gilmore who has come back. Promise me that Mr. Death will never come back.”

And he had said, softly: “He will never come back unless there is work for him to do.”

Her eyes had pleaded with him. “But why even then, Jimmy? Why even then?”

“Sally,” he had answered, “I can never retrace the path I have taken. I took the law into my own hands nine times. The law, if it knew, would hold me guilty of murder and would make me pay the penalty. We—you and I—can never take the road we would have taken had I never brought Mr. Death into existence to avenge my Father’s death. That road—the road of marriage—is closed to us, however much we may be tempted to take it. We both know that happiness cannot be built upon a foundation stained with blood.

“So what is there left for me, Sally, but to be the servant of Justice, *outside* the law? It has to be

outside, for the law, if it knew that Jimmy Gilmore and Mr. Death were one and the same person, would kill Jimmy Gilmore. The fact that the men he killed deserved death would not make any difference. The fact that the law itself would have killed them for their crimes would not make any difference. And the law would be right.

“So what is there left, Sally? A man has got to do something with his life.”

“Yes,” Sally answered, “a man has got to do something with his life. But”—she had paused and put both her hands in his own—“a girl has got to do something with her life, too. So”—a smile that brought a lump to his throat hovered about her lips—“this particular girl is going to go on helping that particular man in the doing of that something with his life, whatever it is. . . .”

For a minute he had been unable to speak. Then he had murmured: “I’m glad, Sally. It would be terrible . . . alone. . . .”

“There will always be me,” she had answered, softly. “I promise that.”

Now, standing before her door, Jimmy Gilmore remembered those words. He pressed the bell-button—three short rings, a long one, then a short one. He glanced at his watch. Four o’clock. A fine time to be calling on a girl. But he knew that Sally would want it that way, would not want him to keep from her for any longer than necessary that fact that “Alias Mr. Death” had come back.

The door opened. Sally Fortune stood there, in her dressing-gown, beautiful even though just aroused from sleep, slim and blonde. The next instant he was inside, the door was closed, he was lighting her cigarette and his own. She seated herself, he remained on his feet. Thus far neither of them had spoken a word.

“I killed Raul Krendall tonight,” he said.

Suddenly he was on his knees beside her, pouring out the whole story to her, and she was stroking his hair as she listened. He did not see the sadness in her eyes. Mr. Death had come back, and she must play her customary role, must be the one person in all the world to whom he could always come. How lonely he would have been without her, how unbearably lonely!

THE following day, in the Mayor of Newkirk City’s office, all was hectic confusion. Phones rang constantly; reporters tried to crash

the door, demanding statements; the Chief of Police stamped out after a conference, his red face several shades redder. Newspapers with screaming black headlines littered the floor, and over them tramped D. D. Mallow, newly elected mayor on a reform ticket.

"Just when I was getting things to run smoothly," he growled, "this Alias Mr. Death has to come back and throw a monkey wrench into the machinery!"

He ran blunt fingers through his shock of gray hair and snorted his disgust. D. D. Mallow was blunt and forceful; and he called a spade a spade. In fact, he went farther than that.

He called Jimmy Gilmore a no-account wastrel every time he saw him, and he was seeing him now. Jimmy Gilmore's social position gave him easy access to the sanctums of officialdom in Newkirk City. Moreover, Mayor Mallow had been a friend of his father. Thus Jimmy Gilmore's presence here was not a matter for surprise—the mayor would have been thunderstruck to know the real reason for it.

Mayor Mallow stopped in front of the chair in which the young millionaire was lounging.

"Harumph!" he cleared his throat angrily. "Everybody is doing something—that is, everybody in town except you. And there you sit, wearing callouses on your shoulder blades, and not even enough ambition to be interested."

JIMMY GILMORE smiled gently in the mayor's face. "I don't see anything to be excited about."

The mayor set his jaw hard. He scooped up one of the papers from the floor and pointed an indignant finger at the headlines.

"Nothing to get excited about!" he bellowed. "Listen to these: Mr. Death Returns to Newkirk City.... Mystery Killer Is Back... Dragnet Out; All Police on Twenty-Four Hour Duty... Raul Krendall First Victim; Who Will Be Next?"

The mayor's voice was hoarse as he read on. Jimmy Gilmore hardly heard him. Jimmy Gilmore was thinking of other things that were not in the paper. Of the people who were breathing easier today because the slimy hold of the blackmailer, Raul Krendall, throttled them no longer. Like Mrs. Carson, who had received a mysterious package containing her letters—and the money she had

given the blackmailer last night. The rest of the money Jimmy Gilmore had taken from the safe had gone to various worthy charities anonymously.

Portly Howard MacNiel came through an inner door just as the mayor was nearing the verge of apoplexy from too many headlines. MacNiel, owner-manager of the *Sentinel*, jerked a copy of his own paper from his pocket and held it out.

"Look, Your Honor," he boomed. "I don't care what these other rags do; our paper is standing squarely back of you. We all know you were elected on a law and order platform—but can you help it if this crazy killer comes back?"

He drew the mayor to one side. Jimmy Gilmore unknotted himself from his lazy slouch and walked over to them uninvited.

"Why isn't Denton Vail here covering this story instead of you?" he asked Howard MacNiel. "I thought Vail was your star reporter for big stories like this."

"He *was*!" the *Sentinel* owner growled.

"*Was*?" Jimmy Gilmore snapped the word. "What are you talking about? Why, I was talking with him only last night!"

MacNiel clenched his plump fists. "You won't talk to him any more. Neither will anyone else, worse luck. They found him out on Parkway Drive, early this morning. Him and his car. Smashed and burned to a crisp. The police, in reconstructing the tragedy, said he must have been doing at least eighty when he crashed into the abutment of that bridge."

Playboy Jimmy Gilmore's brown eyes flashed. The mayor's office, and the other people in it, seemed to fade from his vision for a few moments of racing thought. He was seeing, in swift review, the amazing series of events that had led up to his present dual role.

A night some years ago. The library of his own home. His own father lying there dead. Killed just as he was about to expose the members of the nefarious Murder Club, who had terrorized Newkirk City with their ruthless killings.

Jimmy Gilmore's vow to get the men responsible for his father's death. The keeping of that vow—down to the last one of the nine members of the infamous Murder Club. By day the bored society idler. By night the grim, relentless avenger. Tracking down, one by one,

his father's killers. With always the neat white card found beside their bodies, with its cryptic words: "Alias Mr. Death."

Then—his last appearance, the one when Mr. Death had officially met his own end. Trapped by a squadron of police planes, his gas tank punctured, his engine beginning to sputter, he had headed straight down in a screaming dive to extinction in the marsh lands bordering the Cannel River.

The police planes saw him knife down into the mists rising over the lowlands. They heard the crash, and later they found bits of wreckage and smashed rushes, where the plane had plunged deep into the bottomless morass of the swamp. And so, officially, Mr. Death had gone to meet his own namesake.

The police flyers had not seen Jimmy Gilmore bail out under cover of the mist. His specially constructed chute brought him down safely, even though the jagged end of a broken tree limb did cut a deep furrow across his forehead. But when he slipped back into his playboy role, nobody associated this scar with the passing of Mr. Death.

Even Jimmy Gilmore, the idler, had been little seen around Newkirk City in the time that followed. Travel. To the far corners of the earth. Trying to forget. Hoping that Sally Fortune would forget, too. Contributing much to scientific knowledge of the forgotten corners of the world. Even this was done anonymously.

And then back to Newkirk City, to find that the information which had brought him back was true: to find the city honeycombed with graft and vice again. The earnest, freckle-faced reporter, Denton Vail, had told Jimmy that he was on the trail of a blackmail ring. That he suspected Raul Krendall....

And now Denton Vail was dead!

"This reporter of yours must have been trying to burn up the Drive, what?" Jimmy Gilmore asked. "Was he drunk?"

MacNiel shrugged. "We can't be sure. The gas tank must have exploded, from the way the body and the car looked. I think the police did say something about finding a broken whiskey bottle close to the car."

Of course it might have been an accident. Jimmy Gilmore didn't think so. He had known the

reporter, knew he wasn't the type to speed recklessly on the winding Parkway Drive. Knew too that he didn't drink on the job but only after hours....

His sister! Jimmy Gilmore sauntered toward the door. The sister might be in danger, too, if her brother had been killed for finding out too much.

"Guess I'll run home and take a nap," Jimmy Gilmore offered. "All this excitement has worn me out."

The mayor snorted his disgust.

CHAPTER III

THE TRUCK OF DOOM



IF THE mayor had seen Jimmy Gilmore an hour later, he wouldn't have snorted. He would not have recognized the playboy as the dignified appearing gray-haired gentleman, who looked like a retired executive or professional man. This dignified individual walked slowly down the quiet apartment house street, appearing to have nothing more on his mind than taking the afternoon air. Really, he was closely studying the green sedan pulled up at the curb just in front of him.

He had noticed this car just a few minutes before, when he drove up to Dorothy Vail's apartment house. He had not liked the looks of the three men in that green sedan. So he had parked around the block and come back on foot to take a closer look.

The sedan door opened and a ratty looking little fellow in a checkered suit got out. "Remember, Ed, tell her it's important—and for cripes' sake, talk respectable," a clipped voice from inside the green car instructed.

Ed muttered something under his breath and headed for the vestibule of a brick apartment house. He didn't pay any attention to the dignified stranger who came up behind him as he was talking into the speaking tube. A woman came out the front door and the gray-haired man disappeared inside before the door could close.

ONCE inside, the old man moved with surprising speed. The elevator was up; he lightly ascended the stairs to the third floor. On

the mailboxes in the vestibule, Denton Vail and Dorothy Vail had been listed as apartment 302. And—most important—he had heard the ratty little Ed say, “It’s about your brother, Miss Vail, but I can’t tell you this way. If you’d only come down....”

Dorothy Vail opened the door just as Jimmy Gilmore’s hand reached out for the bell. She was wearing a brown hat and coat, and she clutched a purse tightly in her left hand. The resemblance to her brother was strong, even to the freckles that stood out like gold spots on the strained whiteness of her face.

She gasped. “You’re not the one who was just talking to me? No, you couldn’t have come up here so quickly.”

“No, I’m not that one. And take my advice: don’t go down where those men are.” He took her arm and tried to lead her back inside the apartment.

“Men?” She demanded. “Are there—”

“Three of them. They have all the earmarks of hoods. It looks like somebody thinks your brother might have confided in you, and is out to get you, too.”

“That’s ridiculous!” she flared. “As far as I know, Denton wasn’t working on anything out of the ordinary. At least nothing that should have gotten him killed.”

She backed against the door. Her right hand slipped quickly inside her purse.

“Who are you? Why are you here? You ask me not to trust the man who just called—how do I know I can trust you?”

“Well asked,” the dignified stranger replied. Then he did a very undignified thing. He snatched the girl’s purse. Took it right out of her hands so neatly and quickly that her eyes could not follow the flash of movement. Before she could cry out he was handing the purse back to her—and also the little gun that had been inside it.

“Hold that under your coat, aimed at me,” he smiled, “if that will make you feel any safer. As to who I am—we don’t have time to go into that now. I want you to know that once your brother did me a great favor. I’m trying to return it now.”

The bell inside her apartment began to ring imperiously.

“I believe your three friends are getting impatient,” he said. “I want to take you to a safe

place. Can we get out the back way?”

Dorothy Vail studied him for a long moment. “You know something,” she decided. “And you think the same as I do—that Denton’s death wasn’t an accident. I—and my little gun—will go with you. We can take the back stairs.”

Dorothy Vail kept the gun under her coat, but when they were in Jimmy Gilmore’s car, and headed for the east side of town, she began to relax. Jimmy was cutting through a warehouse district, where most of the traffic was heavy trucks. He had turned the radio on to a news broadcast of a local station. The ordinarily bored voice of the announcer was sharp and eager and he described the plans to catch the Mysterious Masked Killer, Mr. Death.

THE people should not worry, the announcer went on. Before many hours, this arch-criminal would be behind bars. There was much more of this and not a word about the death of the *Sentinel* reporter, Denton Vail.

Jimmy Gilmore turned the radio low. “The papers didn’t carry much about your brother’s death,” he said kindly. “Do you know of anything else that might help? Like—were his car and tires in good shape? Was the car mechanically efficient?”

“Yes. I’m sure about that. All the *Sentinel* reporters drove company cars, furnished by the newspaper company. You know, you’ve seen them with the word ‘*Sentinel*’ in gold script on the side. And Denton’s regular car was out of order yesterday and he had a brand new one.”

“Uh-huh!” said the gray-haired man thoughtfully. “Anything else?”

The girl hesitated just a second. “Yes. Harvey Blain, a photographer who often worked with Denton, told me this: that a radio car, cruising out on Parkway Drive last night, heard the crash and the explosion.”

She shuddered. “They hurried there and got a glimpse of a gunmetal coupe turning off on a side drive. They kept that out of the papers, so as not to warn whoever was in that coupe—in case they did have anything to do with it.”

Suddenly Dorothy Vail gasped. “There’s a gunmetal coupe, parked down the street now!”

The dignified man behind the wheel smiled. “Calm yourself. There are hundreds of such cars

in town—there's another crossing the intersection ahead."

At that moment the delicately built and sensitive radio on the instrument panel began to stutter and howl. Jimmy Gilmore bent forward to adjust it, then as suddenly straightened up.

Something had warned him, made every nerve tense. Something as invisible and as intangible as the waves which were coming to his radio through the ether. That strange instinct that warns animals of peril—and some humans whose senses have been sharpened by constantly meeting danger—warned Jimmy Gilmore now.

A red truck was coming toward them on the opposite side of the street; the few people on the sidewalks seemed intent on their own affairs; everything seemed very ordinary and matter-of-fact.

Then with a roar, the red truck suddenly speeded up and swerved across the center of the street, heading straight for them!

Any ordinary man would have been caught flat-footed by such an astounding maneuver; would have hesitated for the fraction of a second that would have proved fatal. Not so Mr. Death, who had trained himself to go into action at the first sign of real danger.

"Down!" he cried to the girl, and pushed her down to the floorboards. "Brace yourself!"

With the words he stepped hard on the accelerator. Hidden under the hood of the ordinary-looking sedan he was driving was a specially built engine that could do sixty in second within half a block. Jimmy Gilmore's car leaped forward, at the same time trying to swerve out of the big truck's path.

The driver of the truck was a stocky fellow, with a leather jacket and a dirty cap pulled low over his forehead. He kept the big truck gunned full on, headed straight for Jimmy's sedan.

Something weird and inhuman about that truck driver impressed Jimmy Gilmore even in that moment of flashing action.

Jimmy swerved the wheel more violently, skidding.

He darted between the sidewalk and the onrushing truck. The truck turned sharply, trying to ram him, and just caught Jimmy's rear bumper, throwing him half around. Then the heavy truck, with too much speed to stop, bounced high in the

air as it hit the low sidewalk, careened across it to plunge halfway into the brick front of an auto parts shop.

Glass smashed and bricks came tumbling down. Then, with a deafening roar, flames and black smoke leaped up.

Jimmy Gilmore had brought his sedan to a stop. Dorothy was scrambling up from the floorboards, her eyes big as saucers, but keeping control of herself.

"Why—why," she gasped. "He deliberately tried to run us down, to kill us!"

"Not us—it was you they were after!"

He flipped open a compartment on the dashboard and took out a pair of goggles with rubber suction cups around the lenses. He swung the sedan door open. Dorothy caught his arm.

"Where are you going?" Then as she sensed his purpose: "You can't go in there after that driver; he must be dead already."

The dignified man, who didn't seem so dignified just now, nodded grimly. "Maybe I can find out something, though."

He stepped out to the street and jerked his coat off.

"Don't!" Dorothy pleaded. She shuddered as she glanced at the flames and smoke pouring from the wrecked building. "It's death to go in there."

Jimmy Gilmore jerked himself away from her restraining grasp.

"If I don't come right back out, take my car and go to this address and hide!"

He handed her a slip of paper and turned and ran toward the fire, wrapping his coat around his head.

"Come back!" Dorothy called vainly. "Please, oh, please—"

But Jimmy Gilmore was already into the swirling mass of smoke and flame. The coat around his head gave some protection; the tight-fitting goggles kept the smoke out of his eyes and gave him some measure of vision. He stumbled over bricks, splintered boards and shattered glass, past the side of the wrecked truck, up to the crumpled cab. The driver was there, hanging half out of the open door. He was limp and quite inert.

FLAMES spread fan-like along the floor, licked greedily as more gasoline spilled out. Jimmy Gilmore leaped through a patch of this, caught the

limp figure of the driver in his arms. As he jerked him out of the cab, he noticed a very strange thing in the flickering red light.

But there was no time to waste. It was like the inside of a furnace. Heat and smoke were choking Jimmy Gilmore, making him cough and stumble, in spite of his wonderful fund of reserve strength. Panting, gasping, with the truck driver in his arms growing heavier every second, he worked back along the side of the truck and back to the sidewalk.

Dorothy Vail was waiting there. She gasped her thankfulness and helped him put the limp figure of the driver down.

"Are you hurt? Are you all right?"

"I'm all right," Jimmy Gilmore replied. "I'm afraid this fellow isn't, though."

He whipped off the goggles and drank in great gulps of the fresh, reviving air as he knelt beside the driver.

"Look!" Dorothy cried. "There are strips of tape on his hands and some hanging from the back of his neck. And he's lying so still. He—he must be dead!"

"That tape," Jimmy Gilmore said coldly, "held this man in an upright position, with his hands on the wheel."

"But why—"

Jimmy opened the truck driver's leather jacket, ripped open his greasy shirt. A bullet hole showed, just over the heart.

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy.

"This man was dead as the truck came at us! He's been dead several hours!"

The dignified appearing man, who didn't look quite so dignified with his face blackened by smoke and his gray hair somewhat singed, stood up and glanced around. People were collecting down the street, but fear of more explosions kept them at a discreet distance from the fire. Fire engine sirens were howling as they converged on the scene.

HE caught Dorothy Vail by the arm. "Come on, we've got to get out of here fast!"

By the time they reached his car a long ladder truck was swinging in at the next corner. Jimmy needed all the speed in his specially geared engine. His sedan darted forward, reached the alley in the middle of the block, and skidded into

it before the fire truck could block the way.

Behind, people who had done nothing but stand and gape, now came to life and began to point after the fleeing sedan.

"Stop them!"

"He done it. That gray-haired guy—"

"He caused the whole thing! I seen it!"

A wry smile twisted the corners of Jimmy Gilmore's mouth as he skillfully dodged through traffic for a dozen blocks, keeping a sharp lookout in the rear view mirror. Then, satisfied that he had shaken off any possible pursuit, he turned into a quiet residential street.

Dorothy Vail turned to him, her eyes wondering.

"I don't understand it. How could that man drive that truck when he'd died several hours before? I don't believe in ghosts and black magic, but—"

"This is something much more dangerous than ghosts or black magic," the gray-haired man beside her said grimly. Then his face softened.

"I don't blame you for being suspicious of me at first, but I believe you've changed your mind about me now. Is there anything you haven't told me; anything that might help me track down your brother's killer? So far I only have an idea without a bit of proof to back it up."

Dorothy Vail reached in her purse, where the little gun now rested. She took out a slip of yellow paper.

"I found this in the vest pocket of one of Denton's suits. It's only the address and phone number of somebody called Pinkey. It might be important, or it might not mean a thing."

Jimmy Gilmore hoped fervently that it would mean something. Since the truck driver was dead and the truck itself a twisted mass of charred wreckage, he had no way of building up proof for the theory that was forming in the back of his mind. Just at the moment there was another thing that had to be taken care of.

Dorothy Vail's safety. He let her out at a corner, where she could walk to a quiet, small hotel in the next block and register under another name. Jimmy watched until she was safely inside. Then he turned and drove down Tenth Avenue.

Entirely too many people had seen him in this role of the gray-haired man. This sedan, too, had a scarred rear bumper and a small dent in the

fender from that near collision with the truck. He would have to take care of these details.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCENT GROWS HOT



HERE Tenth Avenue ran out of the business district and became a street of older homes, set in wide, tree-shaded lawns, Jimmy Gilmore turned into a hedge-bordered drive. He let himself into a spacious garage that connected directly with a wing of the quiet house.

Jimmy Gilmore rented this house under another name. Many times, as now, he had found it convenient as a base of operations, and a place for quickly changing his appearance. He went into a room at the side of the garage and slid back a section of the wall paneling. Behind it showed a roomy closet, filled with costumes of every conceivable type, from full formal dress to a dockhand's soiled dungarees.

And as Jimmy Gilmore threw off the gray-haired wig and changed to a cheap, dark gray suit, he instinctively seemed to change *himself* to fit the new role. Instead of the dignified bearing, he slouched, and lost more than an inch of his height.

A hard rubber set of forms, fitted by tiny suction cups to the gums next his back teeth, lengthened his mouth and changed the entire aspect of his face. By changing the oral cavity it also altered the tone of his voice. And when he spoke again it would not be in the careful, cultured accents of the dignified man who had come into this room.

Driving through the rush of homeward bound evening traffic ten minutes later, Jimmy Gilmore was just as inconspicuous and ordinary looking as the gray coupe of popular make he drove. He might have been any one of a thousand clerks coming home from work. At the busier intersections, traffic cops and specially posted plainclothes men let their eyes flicker over him for an instant, then turned to scrutinize the occupants of other cars, looking for a more likely prospect for the person of Mr. Death. Certainly this guy in the gray coupe couldn't scare a rabbit, let alone terrorize a whole city.

Jimmy Gilmore had with him only two

reminders of his dignified, professional appearing role. The slip of paper with Pinkey's address on it and the long-barreled .32 revolver. And one new thing—a paper-wrapped cardboard box on the seat beside him. It, too, looked harmless enough, like a package he had just bought at some store to take home.

He drove down Elm Street, until the buildings got dingy with the smoke from the nearby railroad yards, then he swung into 56th. Pinkey lived two blocks farther down this way. And Jimmy Gilmore, who never forgot a face, remembered that one of the three suspicious men in the car outside Dorothy Vail's apartment, had been a redhead. It began to tie in.

Denton Vail, the dead reporter, had been on the trail of the blackmail ring. He had had an ace nose for news and he possessed sources of information all over the city. For some reason or other he had jotted down the address of a man called Pinkey. This Pinkey would bear investigating.

Jimmy Gilmore parked at the curb close to a cut-rate drug store. He saw a phone booth inside. He wanted to call Harvey Blain at the Sentinel and see if he could get an appointment with the photographer. Dorothy had mentioned him; in taking pictures for her brother he might have learned something.

Just as Jimmy Gilmore got out of his coupe a light truck swerved around the corner. A man in the back threw out a bundle of newspapers, a waiting newsboy scooped them up as soon as they hit the sidewalk. He tore off the string and began to yell, "Wextra! Wextra!" even before he glanced at the headlines.

"Man killed on Crest Boulevard!" he amplified a moment later. "Newspaper photographer goes through guard rail! Paper, Mister? Read all about it."

The newsboy got one quick sale—Jimmy Gilmore, who was reading all about it, as he pulled his gray hat lower to hide the scar that was burning redly on his forehead. The accident, in spite of the furor about Mr. Death, got space on the front page. With pictures on page eight.

PICTURES Harvey Blain hadn't taken. Pictures that showed the splintered hole in the guard rail, where Crest Boulevard wound along

the hills in the north part of the city. Another picture that showed the broken, charred mass of wreckage that had been the picture-man's car, piled up on the rocks two hundred feet below the road. One door of the car showed a smudged remnant of the script letters, "*Sentinel*."

It must have been suicide, the story ran, or an attack of dizziness or some other ailment that allowed the speeding car to get out of control. Because the car must have been going at high speed to break through the heavy guard rail. They couldn't tell much from what was left of the car, and they couldn't tell anything from what was left of Harvey Blain.

Jimmy Gilmore walked toward Pinkey's address, careful to slouch and not let the inward turmoil that was seething inside show in his gait or manner. So Denton Vail's photo man had been killed, too! Either Blain had known too much or the killer had feared he might know too much. That left only Pinkey as a possible source of information.

Two plainclothes men lounged on the corner, not fooling anybody in this hardboiled district. Jimmy noted the number on a shoddy frame residence that had been made into a rooming house. The three-story yellow apartment house, on the other side of a vacant lot, should be Pinkey's number.

It was. A green coupe turned into the vacant lot and skidded to a stop. The locked wheels had not stopped sliding when a red-headed fellow jumped out and almost ran into the side door of the apartment house. He glanced back nervously over his shoulder and Jimmy Gilmore saw his face. It was one of the men who had been waiting outside Dorothy Vail's place earlier this afternoon.

Lights came on behind drawn blinds at a ground floor window a moment after Pinkey went inside. Jimmy strolled across the lot, close to the side of the building. Only one shadow moved quickly back and forth across the window blind and no sound of voices came from inside.

Jimmy Gilmore turned and went back to the drug store. Pinkey was obviously nervous, scared. There might be a way to take advantage of that.

From the drug store booth he dialed Pinkey's number. A hoarse voice rasped, "Well?"

"Pinkey!" squalled Jimmy, his voice trembling and cracking. "Look out! Hell's poppin'! They got wise to—"

Jimmy rapped smartly, twice, on the metal of the phone with his penknife. "My Gawd—" He let his voice die off in a choking groan.

"What? What's gone wrong?" Pinkey was yelling at the other end of the wire. "The cops? Who—"

Jimmy Gilmore hung up and went out to his car. He'd no more than stepped on the starter when Pinkey came running out of his place and jumped in his coupe. He went flying away down the street and the two plainclothes men on the corner stared after him curiously.

PINKEY was easy to follow, even though he drove fast. Dusk was falling, the street lights coming on, and Jimmy stayed close, taking no chances on losing him. Pinkey went straight down 56th Street for a dozen blocks, turned right and went to the alley beyond 53rd. Here he turned in sharply.

It would be a give-away to follow him into that quiet alley. Jimmy Gilmore circled the block, coming to the other end of the alley. Pinkey's coupe was parked at the back of a large brick building. Leaving his car parked on the street, Jimmy Gilmore slipped down the alley.

A heavy, zinc-lined door was open barely an inch. Pinkey, in his panic-stricken hurry, had forgotten to close it! Jimmy eased through and found himself in the back of what seemed to be an unused warehouse. There were rooms partitioned off close by and from one of these angry voices came.

Jimmy tiptoed closer and the voices became clear.

"I'm not havin' a pipe dream!" Pinkey's strained voice was defensively stubborn. "I tell you somebody called me. Maybe it was the boss."

"The boss wouldn't call you, punk."

Jimmy had reached the partition. Through a crack in the boards he saw the speaker, a thin, gaunt man with deep lines in his face. Another who had been in the car with Pinkey outside Dorothy Vail's place! Jimmy's eyes moved to a third man who got up from a cracked wooden chair. That was Ed, the ratty little one who'd rung Dorothy's doorbell. This was getting somewhere.

"Say!" Ed snapped to the gaunt man. "I just thought of something. Remember Pinkey didn't want to go to his own place to hide out. He wanted to stay here with us. Suppose he just got cold feet and made up this phone call gag to get some company?"

"If I thought that—" the gaunt one flared.

"Naw! I'm givin' you the straight dope," Pinkey cried. "Let's don't stand here arguin'. Let's find out what's happened and what this is all about."

"That's what *we'd* like to know," Ed spat, disgustedly. "Don't you remember that Bakrum told you to lay low, to stay holed up until all this blows over? Nobody but a dope would go chasing around right now like you've done—when there's a cop hiding behind every ashcan!"

The thin, gaunt man's eyes became thoughtful. "I believe Pinkey may be telling the truth," he said slowly. "And if he is—where does that put us? Who called him, and why?"

"You say you didn't recognize the voice?" Ed growled.

Pinkey shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Naw—he was yellin', scared to death. And there were shots, two of 'em. Naturally, I thought one of you was in trouble."

The gaunt man spoke sharply. "Maybe we're *all* in trouble. We haven't thought of one angle. Some honest but not so sappy gumshoe could have had a brainstorm. Called Pinkey and thrown a scare into him. Then followed him when he came running to us!"

Ed cursed and whipped a gun out. Pinkey's face looked even whiter under his red hair.

"No, Bakrum!" he told the gaunt man. "No; I'm certain that wasn't it. Nobody followed me here. I watched careful!"

"*Like hell you did!*" a harsh voice rasped behind Jimmy Gilmore, and something hard and round jammed into his back. "Just come out here and see how careful you watched!"

CHAPTER V

OUT OF THE ETHER



HERE was a chorus of exclamations and a flurry of feet on the bare floor as the three inside rushed for the door.

"Come and get him!" the man behind Jimmy Gilmore exulted. "Maybe you got yourself an earful but it won't do you no good with a bellyful of lead!"

Jimmy Gilmore tensed, waited. He knew at this instant that the slightest move on his part would send a bullet ploughing into his back. The man behind him was set for that. But in just a second, when the door flew open and the others swarmed out, his attention might be drawn to them for just an instant.

The door banged open. Ed, in the lead, squealed:

"Who is it? A cop?"

And then the gun pressure in Jimmy Gilmore's back relaxed a trifle—and Mr. Death went into action.

He whirled, throwing his right elbow back in a way that caught the thug's gun, knocking it to one side. Reflex action jerked the trigger. Jimmy felt his coat twitch and the smell of cordite was strong in his nostrils. Still spinning, he caught the gun wrist in a twisting, bone-breaking hold.

There was a sharp cry of agony. The gun went spinning away. Jimmy Gilmore had an instant's glimpse of the dark, stubble-covered face close to his, mouth open in that involuntary cry. Then he spun still farther, bringing the other's arm over his shoulder, and sent the stubble-faced man flying through the air straight at Pinkey in a perfectly executed flying mare.

Pinkey, squealing senseless mouthings in surprise and fright, had nevertheless led the advance through the door. He, and Bakrum and Ed behind him, had their guns out. Pinkey dodged instinctively from the body hurtling through the air at him, trying to shoot and dodge at the same time.

Besides that, he dodged into his two companions, Ed and Bakrum, jostling them off balance and sending their first shots wild. Pinkey, his greenish eyes shining wildly under his red

hair, held the trigger of his automatic back, spraying lead at random.

With such shooting it wasn't strange that the stubble-faced man, flying through the air in front of them, should stop some lead. He cried out again as he hit the floor, and twisted there, writhing and kicking.

Mr. Death had wasted no time. He threw the stubble-faced man, then closed in on the others before they could get themselves set. He shot once and the ratty little Ed slammed back against the partition. Then the gun fell out of Ed's limp hand and he sat down slowly, his back sliding down the partition, his legs buckling under him. He was dead before he completed this involuntary operation of sitting down.

Mr. Death, running low like a fullback carrying the ball, was almost to Bakrum and Pinkey when he tripped over the stubble-faced one's sprawled legs. The gaunt Bakrum ripped out a triumphant oath and swung his gun in a swishing arc for the side of Mr. Death's head.

Tripped and falling, Jimmy Gilmore had time only to throw himself in the air, and jerk one shoulder up to partly block that crushing blow. It raked across the top of his shoulder and jarred against the side of his head. A red mist seemed to rise up from the floor and engulf him.

Out of it he dimly heard Bakrum rasp: "That fixes his snooping!"

And then the shrill of police whistles, the angry whine of a siren. And Pinkey, babbling, "We gotta get out of here. These three are done for anyway. Let's scam!"

Their feet pounded away on the board floor. The whine of sirens came nearer. And then, groggily, Mr. Death rose to his feet, staggering.

An ordinary man would have been out cold from that stunning blow. But Jimmy Gilmore, alias Mr. Death, kept himself in constant training, in physically perfect shape. Now the quick recuperation such training gave him stood him in good stead.

The stubble-faced man and Ed were motionless with the stillness of death. And outside in the alley, there were running footsteps and shouts. Mr. Death couldn't afford to be found here with two dead bodies. He had other work to do.

He turned and ran to where stairs wound up around a freight elevator. He was past the third

floor when the back door burst open and cops swarmed in, exclaiming over the dead men on the floor. Silently, he ran on up, strength flowing back into his body at every step.

The locked door leading to the roof stopped him only until he tried the third master key from the special key ring he always carried. The air on the roof top was cool and invigorating. Jimmy Gilmore drifted like a shadow to the parapet wall.

The top of the adjoining building was two stories down and a good six feet away. Close at hand was a fire-escape, leading down from the roof. Far below, in the space between the building, voices sounded and beams of flashlights darted around.

Mr. Death went down the fire-escape. A flashlight beam played over it, but the cop below saw nothing. Jimmy Gilmore was flattened in a window recess. Then he slipped down to the next landing. It was six feet across and at least that many down to the narrow parapet wall of the next building. He balanced for a moment on the rail of the platform, then threw himself out into space.

"Hey!" came a voice from below. "I thought I saw something move up there. Like it was jumping."

"Nuts!" was the gruff answer. "What do you think we're hunting? Flying squirrels?"

A FLASHLIGHT beam played on the empty fire-escape. Gilmore had landed on the narrow fire wall, balanced precariously for a moment, then disappeared from sight. The next building was closer; a fire-escape on the opposite side let him down to the ground. He made his way to the street and calmly walked back to where he had left his gray coupe.

Jimmy Gilmore then drove in a peculiar fashion back and forth through the city. He found it difficult to mask the inner tenseness that was boiling inside him. Twice now he had nearly had some definite proof in his hands. Once when the truck had attempted to smash them; again when he had tricked Pinkey into leading him to his companions. And both times he had been left with empty hands.

This could not go on indefinitely. The brains behind the blackmail ring had to be found. Otherwise Dorothy Vail was safe for tonight, but she couldn't stay in hiding forever. As soon as she

was found, she would be killed. And then the blackmail ring, with another contact man to take the place of the late Raul Krendall, would go on its nefarious way.

Jimmy reached the northern limits of Newkirk City, turned east for six blocks, and then went south again down Merced Avenue, clear to the southern outskirts of the city.

Had any of the numerous patrol and radio cars been following him, they would have thought his driving very strange. North and south through the city; then each time he moved six blocks farther east and came back. That way he was covering the entire town, and coming within three blocks of every point in it.

Had anyone been able to see inside the paper-wrapped box on the seat beside Mr. Death, they would have thought it stranger still. The side of the box next to Mr. Death was open now, and occasionally he took a hand from the wheel to adjust some dials inside. It looked like a very small portable radio with a loop antenna mounted on a pivot on top. No words or music came from it. Instead, two tiny wires ran up to a small earphone that was hidden under the brim of Mr. Death's ordinary gray hat.

When he had covered over half the city, the earphone suddenly came to life with a rasping, stuttering sound. Eagerly Jimmy Gilmore adjusted the dials, turned the directional antenna until the stuttering sound came in strongest. Then he drove quickly in that direction.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLUE SEDAN



IT WAS only a short drive, and it led into the part of town he knew best. The ultra-respectable residence section. Jimmy Gilmore, as the millionaire playboy, had been a guest in most of the fine homes he drove past now. None of their occupants would have recognized him as the ordinary fellow in the gray coupe.

The stuttering sound became a high whine, that sometimes broke into dots and dashes. It got stronger until he drove past an immense stone house set far back in a carefully landscaped lawn. Then the sound began to lessen. Jimmy Gilmore

drove around the block, just to make sure. There was no doubt about it. He left his car in the darkness under a big oak tree and vaulted the stone fence into the landscaped lawn.

Several windows in the big house were lighted. Jimmy Gilmore didn't care about the house. He kept close to the driveway leading to the large, two-story garage.

All the doors were closed; the ground floor windows were of glazed glass. Light came dimly through these windows and Jimmy Gilmore thought he could make out a soft hum, like a motor running, from inside. He went around to the back. His skeleton keys let him in through a door into a small storeroom. Silently he crossed it and opened the inside door a crack to peer out into the long expanse of the garage floor.

A car was moving over the floor. A blue sedan. It headed straight for the closed front door. Then when it seemed it was going to crash into it, the car stopped suddenly. Then it began to back up, coming toward the storeroom where Jimmy Gilmore watched.

There wasn't anything so very extraordinary about all this—except that there was no driver behind the wheel in the blue sedan. Nor anyone in it at all. Jimmy Gilmore saw this plainly as it came closer.

He wasn't much surprised. He was concentrating his attention on a plump figure in a gunmetal coupe. The coupe was standing at the far corner of the garage, next to a rack of oil and gas drums. The man in the coupe seemed to be fiddling with something on the dash of his own machine. Every time he made a movement, the empty blue sedan responded as if he had been driving it.

The blue sedan backed within a few feet of the storeroom door before it stopped. Jimmy Gilmore had been studying how to get across the open garage floor without being seen. He crouched down, until he was hidden by the sedan. Then he eased through the door and in two quick steps was crouched on the rear bumper.

Again the blue sedan started for the front door. Jimmy Gilmore jumped off just before it passed the gunmetal coupe. The man in the coupe pressed a button on a small panel that folded out from his regular instrument panel. The blue sedan

stopped. "Thanks for the ride!" said Jimmy Gilmore.

The portly man in the coupe jumped as if a bomb had gone off under him. His head jerked around, his mouth hung open ludicrously. He stared with bulging eyes at the man facing him, who just then didn't look a bit ordinary and not at all harmless. Especially considering the long-barreled gun in his hand.

"So, MacNiel, your paper stands up for the mayor, does it?"

THE chilling coldness of Mr. Death's voice cut to the bone. "You help drive lawlessness out of Newkirk City, do you? And all the time in your position as owner of the Sentinel you were collecting gossip and stuff that could be used as blackmail and squeezing your victims through your agent, Raul Krendall!"

The newspaper owner's voice shook. "Who are you? What are you talking about? My God—you're—you're—"

"Yes!" came the answer. "The man who killed Krendall! Mr. Death!" Jimmy Gilmore pointed to the control panel, near MacNiel's trembling knees.

"A clever little trick, running a car by radio control. You killed your own reporter, Denton Vail, that way, when he began to get wise to your blackmail activities. You tried to get his sister and me with that truck, when somehow, prepared for the eventuality of your three hoods falling down on their job, you spotted us on your own. You did get Vail's photographer by running his car off Crest Boulevard. And I suppose you were fixing this car up tonight to have it ready for the next victim—who would have been Dorothy Vail."

Only terrified, gurgling sounds came from the newspaper owner's gaping mouth.

"It was kind of you to practice tonight," the cold, inexorable voice went on. "That enabled me to follow the waves right here. I'd suspected the way it was done ever since that truck tried to crash us, but I had to have proof. Now, if you'll kindly step out of that car—"

MacNiel, shaking with terror, had the door open when a voice that Gilmore recognized interrupted:

"Cripes! I thought I killed this guy once! And here he is again, asking for more. Shall we satisfy him, Pinkey?"

Jimmy Gilmore didn't need to turn to know that gruff tone. It was Bakrum, the gaunt man who had clipped him on the head, back at the warehouse. Jimmy let his long-barreled gun clatter to the floor at a nervous order from Pinkey.

"Well, Boss," Bakrum growled. "It looks like you wasn't doin' so good. Lucky for you we happened to come up here. This same guy put the heat on us down at the warehouse. He sure gets around!"

"Of course he gets around," MacNiel babbled. "Do you know who he is?"

"No, but he's sure bad medicine. He got Ed and Walters—"

"To hell with them!" MacNiel was beginning to recover his nerve. "He's Mr. Death!"

The two hoods gasped. They were advancing slowly, close behind the radio-controlled blue sedan, holding guns at their hips.

Jimmy Gilmore's thoughts were racing. The two gunmen were deadly dangerous, but the flustered MacNiel, now halfway out of his gunmetal coupe, was within reach. Catch the leader, hold him for a shield while he scooped up his own gun from the floor—and Jimmy Gilmore would have the upper hand again.

"If that's Mr. Death," Pinkey rasped, "what are we waiting for? Let him have it!"

"No! You fool!" The newspaper owner's voice was hoarse. "He said he was the one with Dorothy Vail when she got away from that truck. He's lying, because that was a bigger, gray-haired fellow. But just the same he probably knows where the girl and this gray-haired guy are—and we've got to find them before we can call ourselves safe."

Pinkey hefted his gun suggestively. "Let me work on him—he caused me enough trouble. I'll have him tellin' us all about it in five minutes."

MacNiel grunted assent. And then in a flash of perfectly timed motion Mr. Death leaped sideways. He caught the fat newspaper owner around the neck with one arm, twisting his bulk between himself and the two gunmen. It was an exquisitely timed move. But Mr. Death was not content with that alone. His free hand reached into

the gunmetal coupe, raked across the control panel on the instrument board.

Instantly, the blue sedan leaped backward. It knocked Pinkey and Bakrum against the wall, effectually pinned them there. It could have crushed them, but Mr. Death was not minded to do that—these rats must be held for the law. He reversed the control dial just in time to arrest the sedan's crushing power. The two hoods were out cold.

Meanwhile, in Mr. Death's iron grip, MacNiel had ceased to struggle. Jimmy Gilmore felt him go limp.

Without wasting time, making use of the cord and rags that were available, Jimmy Gilmore proceeded to truss up and gag all three. Next, on the only paper he had immediate access to, the cards of "Mr. Death," he quickly jotted down a succinct but complete report of the nefarious operations of the blackmail ring of which MacNiel had been the head and Raul Krendall the principal agent. He detailed the method whereby Denton Vail and Harvey Blain had met their deaths and whereby an attempt had been made on the life of Dorothy Vail. He labeled the gunmetal coupe "Exhibit A."

The rest would be up to the police—the search of MacNiel's house, the thorough

examination of his private papers, which were bound to confirm Mr. Death's notes.

Mr. Death's work in the garage was now done. He disappeared into the night.

NOT many minutes later Mayor Mallow, of Newkirk City, got a mysterious telephone call. A voice instructed him to summon a police detail and go at once to the garage of Howard MacNiel, where he would find the end of a trail of blackmail and murder.

Mr. Death knew that such a call, so received, would not, could not, go unanswered. He knew that his night's work was done.

A few hours later, in the sunlight of a new day, he would be James Quincy Gilmore again, idler and playboy so far as the world could see. But to Sally Fortune he would be Jimmy—Jimmy Gilmore—servant of justice, serving it as faithfully outside the law as few men served it within it. And he and Sally would go driving in the country, and would forget for a few brief hours the grim parts they played—forget them until the time when corruption and crime would once more call for suppression.

Then Mr. Death would walk again.