

*Spry Johns.*

XMAS PRESENT? GIVE HIM SEXTON/BLAKE ANNUAL—3/6d.

# THE THRILLER

**LIBRARY  
2<sup>nd</sup> WEEKLY**

**A GUN BATTLE  
FOR THE  
POSSESSION  
OF A COUNTRY  
HOUSE**



**A  
M<sup>rs</sup>PREED  
STORY**

*The*  
**SQUIRE** **CAME** **FROM** **SING-SING**  
**BY LADBROKE BLACK**

# The SQUIRE CAME

## Chapter 1. THE AVALANCHE.

SHAMES lighted a smoking pipe, the rich warmth of the oak panelled, the scent of an admirable Havana—all these details combined to give the library of Chalcombe Manor a cozy dignity. The old, white-haired man seated in the high-backed chair to the left of the hearth nodded over his cigar and then with an effort jerked himself back from the restlessness of sleep.

"Must be nine o'clock! Never can keep awake after my usual bed time, Jermyn. What was I talking about?"

The younger man sitting opposite him faced a smile to his lips.

"About the estate, Edwin."

"Ah, yes! I'm leaving it all to you, of course. He, of luck for you that I inherited the property when I was twenty, before anybody had ever heard of these confounded death duties. I've narrowed it carefully for over sixty years. Long time, you know, Jermyn."

"And many, many more years to come!"

The old man's eyes closed dreamily.

"Perhaps. I'm eighty-four now, you know! There's one thing, Jermyn. You won't come near to the job. Let's see, how long have you been acting as my agent?"

"Five years."

Jermyn Frampton frowned irritably as he looked at his cousin. The old fool had fallen asleep again. He would have to stay until he woke up, otherwise he might be offended. Must leave! And that night of all nights when he had so much to settle!

"It's still raining, Edwin," he almost whispered.

Again the old man roused himself.

"ought to be good for the fishing to-morrow. I shall start immediately after breakfast. You might let Barker know."

He was actually getting out of his chair. Jermyn Frampton sighed with relief.

"If you don't mind I think I'll be toddling off to bed, Jermyn. I expect you've got a lot of work to do before you turn in, haven't you?"

Jermyn Frampton rolled off a number of matters connected with his cousin's huge estate with which he had to deal before he could retire. While he was talking he rang the bell. Grosson, the butler, who had been in service at Chalcombe Manor for fifty years, appeared before he had finished.

"You won't fish the Lower Wood stream, of course, Edwin?" he remarked casually.

The old man looked at him indignantly. He hated any suggestion of coercion.

"That happens to be the particular water I am going to fish!"

Jermyn Frampton gave his shoulders a slight shrug, and glanced at Grosson's wooden face as if asking for his commission.

"Well, I don't think it's safe, Edwin. The lake embankment is in a very bad state, and after this heavy rain there might easily be an accident. You'll please yourself, I expect, but don't say I didn't warn you!"



The murder of the old squire starts the fight for the possession of the Chalcombe estates and a quarter of a million pounds.

Edwin Frampton checked.

"Oh, the don't! Just say my time, don't you worry, Jermyn. When you come into the property you can go to the expense of building a new one. I've got a better use for my money. Good-night, my boy!"

Jermyn Frampton hastened to escape from the house. The August night was alive with the pouring rain. With the collar of his dinner jacket turned up he looked down the steps for the shelter of his car. Ten minutes later he had pulled up at the fire, which had always been the house placed at the disposal of the estate manager. The pretty, croquet-covered building was in darkness save for one room on the ground floor. Leaving his car in the garage Jermyn Frampton hurried through the wet across a lawn to the french windows of that beloved room. As he closed the window behind him a man, who was stretched full length on the settee with a tumbler on the floor by his side, looked across at him.

"You've been a hell of a time! I was beginning to think you weren't coming back, and I was trying to make up my mind whether it would be worth while going to look for you or not."

He was a tall, dark-faced man of fifty, with close-set eyes, and the laugh with which he followed his remark was grating and unpleasant.

"But there was too much rain about—and after all, you couldn't get very far if you did suddenly decide to make a bolt for it."

The flash on Jermyn Frampton's face was not due entirely to the haste he had made to get out of the rain. Into his eyes

there crept something of the look of a whipped ear.

"I don't know what you want to talk like that for!" he muttered, making his way towards the fire. "I've always played the game, Leverett."

Simon Leverett drew up his legs and folded his hands behind the back of his head.

"You couldn't very well help yourself!" he remarked dryly. "You don't think I'm banking on your father and the old school the usual, do you? I happen to have you where I want you, and that's the only reason why you've toed the line. I've been very patient and generous with you, Frampton. You've had sixty thousand pounds out of me for your gambling debts."

"The debt's amply covered! My cousin was telling me only a night ago that he's left me the whole property. And even after the death duties are all paid I'll be worth eight or nine thousand a year."

"Maybe! But I've been kept a long time out of my money. I want to cash in, Frampton. I could do with that hundred and twenty thousand you've got to pay me!"

By throwing back his head he was able to stare at the man standing by the fire. Their eyes held one another in silence for a moment.

"Well, why don't you tell me what you've done?" Leverett exclaimed abruptly.

"My cousin's going to fish the Lower Wood stream to-morrow morning."

Jermyn Frampton's face had gone of a sudden very grey, and the tone of his voice was little more than a sullen whisper. "Good! If he sticks to that it'll be easy."

# FROM SING-SING



I went and had a look at the dam. There's a big head of water there now."

Jerry's Frampton took a step forward. "You weren't such a fool as to go out into the woods?" he gasped. "Some of the keepers may have seen you."

Simon Leverett laughed.

"Don't worry, sweetheart! The way I was trained I can walk anywhere in the dark without being spotted. To-morrow morning, then, we'll have our great clean-up. I'll press the button and the layers in the rock!"

He swung his legs abruptly off the rocks.

"You know all about the old girl's layers, I suppose, and where the will'll be? I don't want any hold-up."

"Manson & Freed, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, have been the Frampton solicitors for nearly two hundred years."

"They'll have the will!"

"Of course."

Simon Leverett looked down thoughtfully at the carpet.

"But supposing the old man's been pulling one on you, just helping you along, making you work hard and look after his interests by pretending he's left you everything in his will?"

"My cousin wouldn't do that! He'd want somebody of his own name and blood to be here after he's gone. The estate's almost a religion with him."

"And if he's forgotten to make a will? They do sometimes."

"Then I inherit as the next of kin—other way it comes to me."

Simon Leverett rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"It seems we're all sitting pretty whatever happens."

He moved across to the table on which

the siphon and decanter were resting. Filling himself a stiff whisky and soda he raised the glass to his lips.

"Happy days, Frampton! They ought to be happy all right after to-morrow! You'll be lord of the manor of Frampton, and I'll have a hundred and twenty thousand pounds—or an near as may be!"

The dawn broke the following morning on the first fishermen's day of the season. Mr. Edwin Frampton, tall and erect in spite of his eighty-four years, made his way towards the river with Harker, the keeper walking a few paces behind, carrying his rod and under. Reaching the banks of the Lower Wood stretch the old man looked with glowing eyes at the water. The rocks rose high on one hand, and on the top was the dam holding back the water which would otherwise have roared over the edge, transforming the placid stream below into a dangerous torrent.

"Couldn't he better, Harker, could it?" Mr. Frampton remarked as he tested himself and began to draw on his waders.

"As you say, sir, couldn't he better!"

Having selected his fly with great care, Mr. Frampton strolled along the bank until he found the place he wanted. Skipping into the stream, he began to fish up water towards the dam.

"You needn't wait, Harker!" he called. "I shall carry on here until lunch."

As the keeper vanished among the trees Mr. Frampton concentrated upon his task. In spite of his age he whipped the water with perfect skill and steadiness. By the end of an hour the trout had found a place in his basket. Now he had come within almost ten yards of the dam. Realizing that he had reached the limit, he was about to wade back to the bank to start all over again when there was a roar like an explosion.

He had a glimpse for a moment of the

He was like a fish out of water. Life at the Manor didn't suit him. But when someone tried to rub him out he felt right at home

A GRIPPING, LONG COMPLETE STORY OF MR. FREED

By  
**LADBROKE  
BLACK**

apparently solid mass of the dam breaking into pieces. The next instant tons of soil and vast masses of concrete tumbled forward on the wave of the liberated waters of the lake were rushing down upon him. He tried to move. In his haste his feet slipped and he came to his knees. Before he could rise, the wall of that avalanche had crashed down upon him. His white hair showed for a second amidst the flood, and then it had vanished.

#### THE OTHER HEIR.

Then instant on, and the funeral of Mr. Edwin Frampton were over. Both had been crowded affairs, the former limited by the size of the coroner's court, the latter merely by the numbers of the deceased's friends and admirers. Mr. Freed of Manson & Freed, Solicitors of Lincoln's Inn Fields, with the left arm of his portly cut morning coat draped with a crisp hand gave his tap hat and neatly rolled umbrella to Croome.

"Mr. Jerome is in the library, sir, with the other gentleman," the butler exclaimed, and then, ordinary humanity breaking through professional dignity: "This is a terrible business, sir. I can't believe even now that the old master's gone!"

"Mr. Freed checked an impulse to reply with a grin except from the library which he had just come from hearing recited. Tall, broad-shouldered, with a large, curiously expressive face, Mr. Freed appeared peculiarly suitable to a funeral.

"He would have been eighty-five in five months, Croome. He had lived a long time and it had always been his desire, when the end came, to go out quickly. That, of course, does not lessen the tragedy for those who have been left behind."

He passed to look woefully at the butler. "You said Mr. Jerome was in the library with the other gentleman. And exactly who is the other gentleman?"

"Mr. Leverett, sir?"

"A friend of your old master's?"

Gezenna flushed slightly, almost as if Mr. Freed had committed blasphemy.

"Oh, no, sir. I've never seen the gentleman before. He's a friend of Mr. Jeremy's, and, if it may be so, sir, he seems to be taking a lot upon himself."

"And exactly what do you mean by that, Gezenna?"

"He asked me for the key of the plate chest this morning, sir, and when I refused to give it him he told me he would speak to Mr. Jeremy and get me dismissed."

Mr. Freed reflected a moment.

"You acted quite properly, Gezenna. No one has any authority over the property of this house until probate has been granted on the estate. You will carry on your duties as before."

As if reassured by the solicitor's tone, Gezenna moved across to the library door and opened it.

"Mr. Freed, sir."

A tall, dark-faced man was standing in front of the fireplace, puffing at a newly lighted cigar. Jeremy Frampton, in the act of pouring something from a decanter into a tumbler, set down the glass to greet Mr. Freed.

"Won't you have anything, Mr. Freed?" he inquired.

"I thank you, no."

Mr. Freed, as he regarded him wearily, noticed that his hands were trembling and his lips twitching. Mr. Jeremy Frampton's nerves were evidently jumpy—a fact he attributed to the shock of the recent tragedy.

"This is my friend, Mr. Leverett—Mr. Freed, of Manson & Freed."

Mr. Freed bowed stiffly to the man in front of the fireplace, almost as if he were not aware of his existence. Simon Leverett took the cigar from between his lips.

"I expect you're just hunting, Frampton, to know what the old boy set up for, so don't mind me."

Mr. Freed, who had brought an attached case with him, laid it on the desk to the right of the fireplace and sat down.

"You wish me to speak before your friend, Mr. Frampton?" he inquired.

"Of course he does. Frampton and I have no secrets from each other, have we, Frampton?"

Jeremy Frampton seeming to acquiesce in Leverett's statement by a nod, Mr. Freed opened the attaché case.

"I may tell you first, Mr. Frampton, that there is no will. Mr. Edwin Frampton corresponded with our firm over a large number of years about the testamentary disposal of his property, but like so many testators he postponed the actual completion of the document until too late. We have no testament in our office, and I have been unable to find one here among his papers."

Jeremy Frampton appeared to receive this piece of news with surprise, but without any visible sign of dejection.

"That's funny, Mr. Freed. The right before he died, in this very room, he told me he'd made a will leaving me the property."

"It is a common infirmity of human nature in such circumstances to take the will for the deed," Mr. Freed replied solemnly, and then, as it appeared that he might have been charged with making an unwelcome guess, added: "People will talk so continuously over a long period of their intention of performing a certain action that in time they believe they have done what they intended to do. But Mr. Edwin Frampton, I have to inform you, died intestate."

## NEXT WEEK

# A G-MAN COMES TO TOWN

A powerful, enthralling,  
long complete story of  
Mr. X.

By Walter Edwards

(See page 590 for full details.)

"Well, that don't matter too much to you, Frampton," Leverett broke in. "You're the man of law."

Mr. Freed ignored the interruption. "In these circumstances the estate devolves according to the provisions of the Administration of Estates Act, 1925. The late Mr. Edwin Frampton was unmarried. His father had two brothers, John and Jeremy. Jeremy Frampton was your grandfather, Mr. Frampton, and as his sole survivor, you take his share in the estate."

"Well, that's what I always thought. My great-uncle, John, never had any children that I heard of."

Mr. Freed put his fingers together, continuing to ignore Leverett, who had drawn nearer, as if determined to join in the discussion.

"According to the act the children or grandchildren of the deceased under the such circumstances take the share of their parents or grandparents per stirpes, or by right of descent."

"You don't have to talk Latin to catch your son, Freed," Leverett interjected.

"Get out all this learned dope and get down to business. What's the value of the property? How much cash is there in the house?"

Mr. Freed turned his blank face to the direction of Leverett for a moment, and then resumed his statement of the position.

"You have been led to assume, Mr. Frampton, that your grandfather's brother, John, died unmarried. In going through my client's papers I am satisfied that he was not only married but that he had a son."

The effect of this announcement on Frampton was demoralizing. He gave a little gasp and then glanced with an expression of apprehension at Leverett, whose dark face had become of a sudden flushed and menacing.

"Here, what are you trying to pull on me?" Leverett exclaimed furiously.

"I am explaining the legal position to Mr. Frampton. I accept no responsibility for any questions you may address to me, sir."

He turned with grave dignity to Frampton again.

"Your great-uncle John, after an unfortunate career in this country, was sent away to America, where he lived on a plantation. He died there at the age of 70. After his death, a certain Madeline Frampton, of New York, wrote to my late client, Mr. Edwin Frampton, announcing that she was Mr. John Frampton's widow, and asking for a continuation of the annuity for the support of herself and her infant son. The correspondence I have discovered shows that Mr. Edwin Frampton, took all the

necessary steps to establish the truth of her story. Having satisfied himself that it was true, he made her an allowance of four hundred a year, which sum was paid to her for ten years, until her decease, the last payment having been made twenty years ago."

"And you think—that this son whom I have never even heard mentioned, has survived, Mr. Freed?"

"Before the estate can be wound up and probate granted we shall have to ascertain whether or no he survives. If he survives he shares equally with you."

"It's a blessing that!" Leverett roared. "Don't you stand for it, Frampton! He's trying to put something across on you! You've never heard anything of this son of your great uncle John—now has anybody else. Freed's just trying to run you up a big bill of costs!"

Mr. Freed addressed himself to Frampton.

"I am here as the solicitor of the late Mr. Edwin Frampton. You will have the goodness to understand, Mr. Frampton, that I would not undertake this business if it concerned merely yourself, for the good and sufficient reason that I could not submit to the impertinence of your friend, whom you deem it necessary should be present at what is a purely private and personal discussion."

Jeremy Frampton quailed. There was something very unbecoming in Mr. Freed's monotonous delivery.

"Sorry, Mr. Freed," he stammered. "Please don't take any notice of my friend. Naturally this has rather annoyed me, however, because you see Mr. Frampton always told me that the property would be mine. In fact, he made me manager of the estate so that I should know how to run it properly."

"Quite!" said Mr. Freed. "Unfortunately matters cannot be arranged in accordance with what you tell me were my late client's wishes. I shall have to satisfy myself first that there is no surviving child or children of your great-uncle, John Frampton. For that purpose I propose to visit America."

"And charge for a private salon in the Queen Mary on the bill, I suppose?" Leverett sneered. "Don't you be a snob, Frampton. Tell this solicitor where he gets off, and find one that'll look after your interests."

Frampton, who had dropped into a seat, hastily drained the contents of his tumbler.

"Have you any idea of the value of the estate, Mr. Freed?"

"I have a note here. Taking the real estate at its last valuation—that is, the Chalcotte estate—and the personal property, I should imagine that, after the payment of death duties, the value could be put down at two hundred and forty thousand, or perhaps a quarter of a million. If you have to divide the property with a cousin you will, at a conservative estimate, inherit at least a hundred and twenty thousand pounds."

Frampton went white to the very lips. "A hundred and twenty thousand pounds!" he gasped. "But—"

He gave one terrified glance at Leverett, and then stopped speaking abruptly. Leverett, as if realising what was in his mind, came over to his side and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't you fret, Frampton. It's a home-ship. Let me handle this!"

He turned and addressed Mr. Freed.

"How much? I've got an interest in this deal. Frampton owes me quite a considerable sum of money."

"I don't think I quite understand the nature of your proposal," Mr. Freed replied woodenly.

"How much do you want to cut out this searching for missing heirs in America and for allowing a quick clean-up? Anything in reason. It would be worth Frampton's while to make it as much as ten thousand pounds."

"Mr. Freed, man to his feet, closing his attache case with a snap.

"The late Mr. Edwin Frampton was an old and respected client of mine. It is due simply to that fact that I propose to ignore the proposal you have just made, sir. Were I to take note of it I might involve a family for whom I have felt for the greatest respect in scandal and disgrace."

"He turned to Jeremy Frampton.

"I wish you good afternoon, Mr. Frampton. When I have carried out my inquiries I will communicate with you. Meanwhile, you will understand, of course, that none of the contents of this house, of which I have an inventory, can be disposed of or alienated from the estate. Good-afternoon, sir!"

#### THE JOHN.

In the aftermath of the sunset the shack on the American side of the Canadian frontier had grown shadowy and mysterious. From somewhere close at hand came the murmur of a stream. Peace and stillness reigned, of the two men standing leaning against the wall of the hut and staring out at the distant view of the mountains, the smaller suddenly spoke. In his blue city clothes he was as plump and round as a football.

"This here picture postcard stuff they puts on when these guys at night knock you, Bat—makes you think of home and mother?"

Stoek Jim blinked his eyes very quickly as he spoke.

"Ever had a mother, Bat?"

"Sure I had a mother!" Bat roared. "Most I remember of her was her head. It was mighty hard!"

Stoek Jim spat with great accuracy at a stone some ten feet away.

"That ain't the sort of mother I was thinking about. Your woman, Bat, is that you ain't got any proper feeling. I'm seeing a mother and hears your prayers at night same as they do in the picture, and wets you all over with a lot of water and puts you in a swell cut."

Bat altered his position slightly to look at his companion.

"You ain't going to tell me, Stoek, that you had a swell dame for a mother like that?"

"Sure I didn't, but it don't do no harm to think you might have had."

"You're nuts, Stoek! What do you want to spin all this mummy talk for when we've all worked up about Big John? Don't you know that if he hasn't made his breakaway on the westward, we've said up—finished. There won't be no going back to little New York without Big John with these other guys waiting for us at every street corner to pump lead into us."

"Did you ever know Big John break a promise?" Stoek protested. "He said he'd be here Friday, the thirteenth,

and there's four hours still to go to midnight."

They stood there, all that was left of Big John's gang that had been wiped out in one of the periodic raids that are the feature of the New York underworld. Big John had been sent away for a stretch, and Stook Jim and Bat Larkin, lost and helpless without their leader, were awaiting his protracted return. Their life-out was one they had used in the profitable days of run-ranning.

Suddenly the two men came to the alert. From far away there had reached their ears the distant rumble of a car. It grew louder and louder. A faint streak of white showed itself on the road, zigzagging road that led up the mountain side. Across Stoek's slumped face spread a look of beatific happiness.

"It's him! What did I tell you?"

Bat laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Lie low! It might be the cops!"

His hand slid to the side pocket of his coat and taking a step forward he dropped behind a boulder. After some hesitation Stook followed his example. The noise of the car in second gear grew louder. Presently its headlights splashed the wooden frame of the shack like the glare of kerosene on the steps. The two men behind the boulder remained motionless. There was the sound of the car door being opened. Bat raised his head slightly above the boulder. A tall man in a dark overcoat, wearing a top hat, had got out.

"They've come for us, Stoek!" he whispered. "He's a new one to me, but he is a police guy all right!"

He pulled the gun from his pocket. As he did so a voice inside it, upon the sill—

"Well, I've made it as I said I would! Get moving, big boy! This is the little home I've set for you for tonight."

As the sound of that voice the two men behind the boulder kept to their feet and ran towards the car. Stoek was the first to reach it. He almost threw himself at the tall, wiry-looking man with the hard-bitten face who, with a gun in his hand,

was slithering his strange looking companion towards the hut.

"Big John?" he exclaimed excitedly. "I know you'd make it!"

"Get any grub? I haven't had anything to eat since I broke out of jail."

"Get it all ready cooked for you, Big John. Bat thought you weren't going to make it, but I know you would. Come right in."

He passed to stride Big John in the ribs, glancing at the same time at the tall, tattered figure.

"Where did you pick that up?" he whispered.

"Five miles back. The fiver I'd jumped broke down. This guy stops to ask me the way, so I shoved my hat into his ribs and had him drive me. He makes a decent chauffeur. One of these days I'm going to hire someone like him to drive me around in the swell joints. That hat of his is real nifty!"

"What you going to do with him?"

"I thought maybe we might hold him for a few thousand bucks. He looks so if he could supply a lot of what we're wanting. Anyway, let's cut first."

Headed by their prisoner, who walked with a monumental dignity, a small red umbrella hanging from his arm, they entered the hut, which was illuminated by a paraffin lamp. From a glowing stove Stoek proceeded to remove a soup-can, the steaming contents of which he poured into a bowl.

"There you are, Big John! Get outside that!"

He waited affectionately on his chief who, sitting himself at the rickety table, ate reverently, pausing only to drain the tumbler by his side which was kept filled.

"Give him some grub!" he said presently, pointing his knife at his prisoner.

"It ain't, I expect, when you want it up."

The man in the top hat certainly ate, but with a dignified elegance which contrasted curiously with Big John's table manners. Twenty minutes later Big John sat back with a sigh and lighted a cigarette. As if taking this as a signal to relax, Stoek and Bat seated themselves at the table, and resting their arms on it, turned and looked at their chief expectantly.

"How did you work it, Big John?" Bat inquired.

"It was easy. I made a phoney gun that looked the real thing. The territory I put out with my hands. When I was outside the cell a pair of malochies were sock-shooting around. They fell for my phoney gun, and when they'd stuck up their tails I grabbed their tails."

He grinned reminiscently.

"Do you know what I did with those two guys? I made them step ahead of me into the yard same as if they were taking me to the warden's office. We walked straight through dozens of other guards but the two malochies I'd got the pull on weren't say anything."

"Bat, when you got to the gate, Big John?" Stoek inquired breathlessly.

"Don't forget I had one of the guards there in the bag. He opens the gate and I walk outside. Just like that. And then, of course, the trouble began. One of the guards awakes, and that makes another at the gate try for me with his heater. But I was outside then, and though the Tommy-guns on the walls got busy, I made it."

He paused abruptly, his rather grim face assuming an almost catleptic stare. Stoek and Bat, following the direction of his gaze, slowly turned their heads. The



"Open that door, Bat," said Big John. "We'll soon find out why that guy, Lovrett, wants this estate."

best moment both their right hands had gone automatically to their pockets.

"Don't touch for your weapons, gentlemen," a wooden, expressionless voice exclaimed.

The tall man in the top hat was standing at the other end of the table with a naked sword in his hand. Even as he spoke the blade made two rapid, darting movements at the right arms of Sleek and Bat.

"Place your guns one at a time on the table! Perhaps you would begin, sir?"

He directed his remarks to Big John, emphasizing it by allowing the point of his sword to play about the other's throat. Reluctantly Big John slid his gun across the table, Sleek and Bat followed suit. Sweeping the weapons towards him, the man in the top hat sat down again.

"From what I've been able to gather from your conversation, you are a party of criminals, one of whom has recently broken out of jail."

Big John glanced calmly at his companion.

"He seems to know all about us. Ain't that just too bad?"

"Your intention, I gather, is to keep me here in the hope of extorting money from me as the price of my liberty. As you may have noticed, your plans have miscarried. I could, I suppose, hand you over to the police, but such a step would entail difficulties which I fully realize. We are some fifty miles from civilization and communication would be difficult. I should be anxious to taking your lives, except in self-defense. That being so, on my time is limited, I propose to make a bargain with you."

"You know what the skeleton said to the girl, big boy!" Sleek exclaimed. "You can't get anything more out of me. That goes for us. We're broke—dead broke!"

"I'm not a high-flyerman. My name is Freed. I am what is known in England as a solicitor."

"I'll bet you are!" Sleek interjected. "What are you doing here, anyway? Why aren't you sitting—what you said—instead of blowing around here with that chess-fork of yours?"

"A solicitor corresponds to what is known over here as an attorney."

"Attorney! Say, why don't you talk English?"

There was an aggrieved note in Bat's voice. Big John soothed him down with a motion of his hand.

"You guys know nothing. What he's saying is quite O.K. I'd a notion since what used to do a lot of corresponding with one of these solicitor wise guys."

Sleek looked at Bat as if he'd just been told where he got off, and thought he deserved what he'd got. Mr. Freed continued wearily:

"I came over to the United States on a professional inquiry. It was my business to discover the whereabouts of a certain person, assuming he was still alive. In New York I addressed myself to the usual sources of information, but without any result. Continuing with my investigations on my own hook—with a description of which I need not trouble you, gentlemen—I met so fortunate as to find a man called Maguire."

The three men round the table were now staring at him intently.

"Do any of you gentlemen know Maguire?"

"Do we know Maguire?" Sleek asked. "You're asking us—the dirt, yellow-bellied, double-crossing ruff!"

"Pipe down, you!" Big John growled.

"And what did that Maguire tell you?"

"He said he could give me no information germane to the question I had asked him."

The man sitting opposite Mr. Freed reentered.

"Quit kidding, dummy guy! That Maguire never talked like that."

"That is what I may describe as the substance of what he said. He further expressed the opinion, that my curiosity might be satisfied if I addressed an inquiry to Mr. Edward E. Walker, attorney-at-law."

Big John brought his hat down on the table.

"You're certainly some here with some swell introductions! Maguire was the rat that sold us, and Walker was the guy that sent me inside for a stretch."

Mr. Freed slightly raised his eyebrows. Mr. Walker informed me that he was unaware of the present address of the individual I was anxious to find, but he added that he knew he sometimes resided in a country house in a place called Blue Creek, on the Canadian frontier. I was on my way to Blue Creek when this gentleman stopped me and under duress brought me here."

"I've heard it called a heater and a red and a gun, but damn it's a new one to me!" Sleek Jim complained.

Big John was looking steadily at Mr. Freed's wooden face.

"What's the great idea you've got at the back of your mind, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is?"

"Freed," said Mr. Freed gravely. "Have it your own way, Mr. Freed, then. What's on your mind now you've got the draw on us?"

"Just this. The neighbourhood seems to be wild and almost lawless. Give me your assistance to find Blue Creek and this man I have been looking for, and we will give the sponge of oblivion over the record of what has happened."

The three men slowly turned their heads and looked at one another. They were all three grinning.

"I seem to have done you a real kindness!" Big John exclaimed. "I've been a regular tourist's agent to you. You're right here in Blue Creek."

"Indeed! Then perhaps you can tell me where I should pursue my inquiries? The neighbourhood does not strike me as being thickly populated."

"You've slobbered a awful three!" Sleek interrupted. "This is the only shack in Blue Creek."

Big John silenced him again with a frown.

"Where's this guy you're after?"

"A Mr. John Frampton."

Sleek buried his face in his hands. Bat Larkin seemed to be conversing with secret mirth. Only Big John retained his gravity.

"That's mighty interesting. We know all about Mr. John Frampton here. But just what might you be wanting him for, insofar? A little affair of luxury with violence, or anything like that?"

"I have no connection with the administration of law and justice in this country. I am here to discover Mr. John Frampton because I have some information to give him which will prove to his advantage. The nature of that information I do not propose to make public."

"Well, you can sell it, Mr. Freed. I'm John Frampton, of Blue Creek. Kin'da run into one another, didn't we?"

Mr. Freed sat motionless for some moments, staring at him.

"May I ask your mother's name?"

"It was Mahlin. But you lay off my mother! She was one of the best!"

Sleek looked.

"Say, Big John, did she kiss you and put you in a small cot, and make you say 'God bless daddy,' same as they do in the pictures?"

"Cut it out, Sleek!" Big John growled.

"And your father's name?"

"My father's name was John, same as mine, and he was a real proper tough guy!"

"You can produce evidence in support of your statements—documentary evidence, I mean?"

Big John rose from his chair and crossed the room to a box that stood in one corner. Opening this he rummaged about for some moments, finally producing a book which he threw on the table.

"My mother gave me that. I ain't done much reading in it, but there it is. She got it from the old man—and what he was doing with it, I never could make out."

The book was a Bible, Mr. Freed saw. Opening it, Mr. Freed found an inscription on the fly leaf.

"To John Frampton from his mother, Chalcombe, 1834."

"How old was your father?"

"Can't say rightly, but he was oldish. I raised my mother telling me that he was in the middle of his tenth attack of the sickness when she met him and married him. That's how they came to be married."

Mr. Freed drew in a deep breath. Even his respect for the law of inheritance was badly shaken—so badly shaken that he began to regret having pursued his inquiries in America.

"You seem to be the person you purport to be," he remarked presently. "For one point requires clearing up. Why did Mr. Walker, who, you told me, was the attorney responsible for sending you to prison, profess that he did not know where you were?"

"That's an easy one. Walker thought you was some guy who was trying to help me to get over the wall, and he knew what would be coming to him if I did. That's why he sent you along here, hoping you'd lose yourself on the way. Maybe he sent somebody to look after you, but he missed you."

Mr. Freed realized he was wading in deep water.

"You will wish to hear, Mr. Frampton, why I have taken all this trouble to make contact with you. Your father, John Frampton, had two brothers. The older had a son, Edwin, who inherited the Chalcombe estate. The younger of your father's two brothers married, leaving a son behind him who in his course also married, and had one son, Jerry. Just a month ago Mr. Edwin Frampton died a bachelor. As he left no will the estate devolves on the descendants of his uncle, Jerry Frampton I have seen. It was to ascertain whether Mr. John Frampton left any heirs that I made my trip across the Atlantic. It would appear that I have now achieved the object of my journey."

There was no note of ostentation in Mr. Freed's voice—but then it was always free from any suggestion of emotion. John Frampton gave a whoop.

"Can you beat it? Do you hear that, boys? I've the long last, missing heir to a real live property!"

"You share equally with your cousin, Jerry," Mr. Freed interrupted.

Sleek glanced at Mr. Freed and shook his head.

"You've got this all wrong, wise guy! Big John don't do any sharing out except with his pals. That's right, ain't it, chief?"

"You flip your jaw so much, Sleek, that

"I can't hear myself talk," John Frampton protested. "I want to know how much is in the bag."

"At a conservative estimate the value of the property, which includes the real estate of Chalcocks Manor, together with a number of valuable securities, may be put at between two hundred and forty thousand pounds and a quarter of a million. Your share would therefore be in the neighborhood of a hundred and twenty thousand pounds—or just short of half a million dollars."

John Frampton's face was beaming with excitement.

"Did you hear that, boss? Half a million bucks! And we haven't got to go and grab it—it's there, being given to us on a plate. We've got to start right away for England."

Mr. Freed coughed.

"It is my duty to remind you, Mr. Frampton, that you have recently broken out of prison."

"Ah, thanks! You want to forget about that, mister. When I'm dressed up good with half a million bucks—when I'm Mr. John Frampton of Chalcocks Manor—that's what you said, wasn't it?"

"I said you shared Chalcocks Manor quite equally with your cousin, Jerry."

"Sure! I loved you the first time. But ain't I still Mr. John Frampton of Chalcocks Manor, or half of it? What dick's going to worry about me? I'll have 'em all in the bag! They won't ever want to remember that I was behind the walls."

"It would certainly be a great convenience and expedient matter considerably could you make the journey to England, Mr. Frampton."

"Don't you get all worked up and worried, Mr. Freed. We'll slip over into Canada—the boys on the gate there know me from the old run running days—and we'll make for the coast. Then we pick up the first ship for England."

Stoek got to his feet, his plump face radiant with excitement.

"When do we start, boss?" he exclaimed.

Mr. Freed turned his wooden face in Stoek's direction.

"Well? You're not proposing, Mr. Frampton, that these gentlemen should accompany you, are you?"

John Frampton looked at him with a smile.

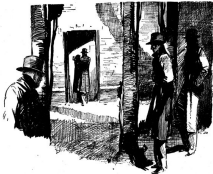
"Sure they're coming! You got this straight, Mr. Freed. These guys have stood by me, and I stand by them! That was always my rule. You can't nobody in New York if Big John ever let any of his crowd down! They'll tell you! And so where I go, they go. Let's be moving!"

#### BIG JOHN'S PROMISE.

As JOHN STOPPED out on the platform of Chalcocks station carrying a valise. Behind him crowded, alert and suspicious, Slim Jim and Hat Larkin, their right hands hidden in the side pockets of their coats, where the pairs from which they had refused to be parted in spite of Mr. Freed's eloquence, were parked. Except for the stationmaster, who had handed him his garden to perform his duties, and a porter who was wrestling with empty milk cans, the platform was deserted.

"Don't look as if this cousin of yours, boss, who thinks he's passing fifty-fifty with you, is going to start any trouble here," Stoek exclaimed in a deep-throated whisper.

Big John grinned. Since the flight from Slim Creek six weeks had elapsed. During that time the diplomatic admissions of Mr. Freed had not been without their effect. Accustomed to the lawlessness of



When Big John went to talk business with his cousin, did he know that these men talked him all the way?

there he had been impressed by Mr. Freed's unfamiliar methods which had made his trip across the Atlantic as peaceful and uneventful as a summer holiday.

It was through Mr. Freed that he had secured a genuine passport from the Canadian authorities. It was through Mr. Freed that he had shed the identity of the scoundrel who had escaped from the state penitentiary. When he had visualized the trip which was to land him in England with half a million bucks, he had seen himself swagger about a liner under an assumed name and changing his hand about landing at Southampton, trusting to his quick wits and ready gun to get him through.

And there had been nothing like that. As Mr. John Frampton travelling to England to take over a big estate, he had shared a luxurious cabin with Mr. Freed; he had dined every night in the best table under the direction of Mr. Freed; he had even got next to quite a number of upstage dolls. There had been no need to hide and lurk in the shadows.

This miracle—for it was such a complete change to the life he had hitherto enjoyed that he regarded it as a miracle—had been accomplished by Mr. Freed, but only after some three weeks' delay. There had been trouble about Stoek and Hat, because Mr. Freed flatly refused to assume any responsibility for their inclusion in the party. In ignoring the fact that John Frampton was an escaped convict, who ought to have been handed over to the United States authorities, the scholar had followed in the interests of the Framptons, as he was prepared to go. It remained for Big John to provide his two companions, by methods known only to himself, with the quite irregular passports which had secured their admission to the country.

"Pize down, Stoek! You've got it all wrong! We ain't here to grab anything that don't belong to us. There ain't no going to be no rough stuff! We're on the up and up! Freed told me."

"Yep! I listened to that guy dripping big words for the last six weeks, boss. And

what does it all amount to when you let it up? This cousin of yours, he's sitting pretty on the goods. He don't know that you're around. He thinks he's got his hands on a million bucks for keeps. And you come along and want to go fifty-fifty. I asks yer, is any guy going to part with a real like half a million bucks without making any trouble?"

He paused to shake the fingers of his left hand under Big John's nose.

"You wouldn't, boss. But here wouldn't. And you can stake your life I wouldn't. See, what do you think you're doing?"

He addressed the last remark to the gray-haired stationmaster.

"Tickets, please, gentlemen!"

Big John hastily produced the tickets. "Look here, old well-mannered-and-frail, you maybe can give us a line. There's a joint round these parts, so I've been told, called Chalcocks Manor. How do we make it?"

The stationmaster scratched his head.

"It's two miles away, sir. Usually Mr. Saunders has his taxi here, but he's gone to the market with some young pigs for Mr. Adams of Grange Farm."

"Mean we'll have to wait?" Big John exclaimed, in a tone of exasperation. "Say, how do you people in this country get about?"

But Stoek had been peering past the stationmaster into the yard outside, where a car was visible with a girl at the wheel.

"Don't get all hot up, boss. It'll be the transport!"

He pushed past the stationmaster through the booking-hall and moved quickly to the side of the car.

"You can't know it, little bright eyes, but you're going right from here to Chalcocks Manor! Me and my pals, you see, are kinda stranded, and we're in a hurry!"

The pretty girl at the wheel looked at him indignantly, but before she could utter the protest that rose to her lips a tall man carrying a valise showed the insulting stranger out of the way.

"You won't want to take any notice of him, mister. He ain't ever had any proper education. We're in a jam. The old guy that runs this depot has just been telling

see that there ain't no driver that can take us to Chalcocks Manor, I'm John Frampton."

The haughty, distant air that the girl had assumed vanished abruptly.

"Not the late Mr. Edwin Frampton's cousin from America that we've all been hearing about—the Uncle John's son?"

"Sure, that's me."

"How very interesting! Have you only just arrived, Mr. Frampton?"

"Yes, only just made it."

"I'm Edith Caruthers. My people live at the Red House."

The girl's lips were twitching with laughter. Big John was looking at her with undiminished admiration.

"You're a swell dame anyway, whatever they call you! Meet my friends. This is Skeek Jim, Bud Larkin. They've got other names, but I forget 'em."

Edith Caruthers shook hands with each of the men in turn.

"I'll drive you up with pleasure, Mr. Frampton. Do please get in. I suppose the rest of your baggage is being sent on later?"

"That's so!" Big John exclaimed, as he slipped into the place by her side—though all his worldly possessions at the moment were contained in the valise which he hung to Skeek and Bud in mind.

Edith Caruthers swung the car round and glided up the station approach into the main street of Chalcocks. At the sight of the old, half-timbered house Skeek could not contain his excitement. Leaning forward, he touched Frampton on the shoulder.

"Say, boss, I thought they only had these sort of places on studio sets!"

"This is Chalcocks village, Mr. Frampton. It all belongs to the estate. Have you ever been here before?"

"No, this is my first trip."

"It must be rather exciting for you, Mr. Frampton. I suppose your father often talked to you about his old home?"

"The old man talked out from too much liquid groceries when I was a kid in arms. If he talked about the old place, I don't remember what he said. I'm seeing it, sister, for the first time. It sure looks a good place to sleep in."

"I think it's the loveliest village in England," the girl answered. "Of course, if you come from New York it must seem rather quiet to you."

Big John looked out on the sun-drenched street with its old houses. It was deserted except for a dog sleeping outside the Frampton area.

"Kind of quiet," he admitted.

The girl drove on in silence for some moments. Then abruptly she spoke again.

"I hope you won't think it very impertinent of me, Mr. Frampton, but everybody in the neighborhood is so anxious to know what you and your cousin are going to do with the property."

"We go fifty-fifty."

"Yes, I know that," she answered with a laugh. "What I meant was, how are you going to divide it? You can split the money, but when it comes to dividing a house and a lot of land, there's a different matter."

"The way I got it from the attorney that day me out, somebody comes along—a visitor, I think they call him—who sets a price on the house and the land, that's added to the kitty in which the cash has already been entered up, and then the whole lot is split, each of us drawing an equal share."

"Then it is true that you're going to sell the Chalcocks estate?" she asked. "I didn't believe it when I heard it. I

suppose you've agreed already to the price I understand Mr. Leverett has offered?"

"That's a new one on me. What's this guy, Leverett?"

"He's a friend of your cousin's. He's been staying at the Manor ever since Mr. Edwin Frampton's death."

He repeated her with undiminished interest.

"You wouldn't like this Leverett to buy the place? Just why are you worrying?"

She flushed a little under his gaze.

"I suppose because there's always been a Frampton at Chalcocks Manor, and in this part of the world we don't like change. Anyway, I think Mr. Leverett is desirable!"

Big John nodded his head thoughtfully.

"Get this, sister. Nobody can have Chalcocks Manor and what goes along with it unless I agree. And if you don't like this Leverett, he shan't have it!"

He stopped speaking abruptly. The car had just swung him through some ornamental-iron gateways. Ahead of them in the October sunshine stretched Chalcocks Park. In the distance was visible the roof and chimneys of the Manor.

"Say, what's this place, sister?"

"The very place we were just talking about—Chalcocks Manor—the home of the Framptons."

Big John's eyes lighted up.

"What's this guy Leverett, anyway? If he thinks he's going to jump this property he's going to be told just where he gets off."

At that moment Simon Leverett was pacing up and down the library floor of Chalcocks Manor, while Jerry Frampton watched him with marked bloodthirsty eyes.

"You've got that clear now, haven't you, Frampton? When this Yank comes along you take the property here at the valuation and thirty thousand in cash. He takes the rest of the cash."

"But supposing he won't agree?"

"Whether he agrees or not, doesn't matter! I want this property. Freed told us John Frampton isn't married, and so he can't spring any more of your confounded relatives on us. I need a little time, that's all, just to attend to Mr. John Frampton!"

He paused in his restless walk to lay his hand upon the other man's shoulder.

"You're going to come into this property before he has time to make a will leaving it to anybody else. I'll see to that. Just in case there's a slip up anywhere, I mean to make sure of the land and the house. I can do something big with it. Not that there will be any slip up, anyway."

He gave a confident laugh.

"This Yank won't want the place. All he'll ask to do is to cash in as quickly as he can and get back to the States. And that'll suit me."

"Mr. John Frampton, sir?"

The voice of the butler abruptly cut short his remarks. The eyes of both men were turned towards the door.

#### A FRAMPTON AT THE MANOR:

Some Frampton strode into the library with the air of one who was making no attempt to disguise the fact that he was in unfamiliar surroundings. At the sight of Simon Leverett, who had moved a few steps forward, so that he partially concealed the other man, who had not yet struggled out of his chair, he advanced towards him with bated head out.

"Shake, cousin. Maybe you're used to having relatives, but it's a new line for me!"

Leverett flinched under that grip. Big John went on talking.

"This is a swell joint," he exclaimed admiringly. "What has knocked back somebody several thousand bucks?"

"This is Mr. Jerry Frampton," Leverett interrupted. "My name's Leverett. I'm a friend of your cousin's."

Big John shook hands enthusiastically with Jerry Frampton.

"Leverett! I've heard of you. Ain't you the guy that's thinking of buying this place?"

Simon Leverett gave an almost imperceptible start.

"I don't know where you got that information, Mr. Frampton, but as a matter of fact I did make a proposal to your cousin."

"Then forget it! This place can't be sold without my consent, and I'm not consenting."

Leverett reddened angrily.

"I don't think you can possibly understand the position, Mr. Frampton. The place has got to be disposed of in order that the estate may be divided equally between you and your cousin. You haven't even had an opportunity of considering my offer yet."

"I'm not going to consider it. Get that? I like this place. More of my ancestors, ain't it? I'll allow I never heard of them till six weeks back, but now I've got used to 'em, nobody's going to part me from them in a hurry. If it comes to that, what do you want the place for?"

But that was a piece of information which Simon Leverett had an intention of imparting, either to John Frampton or to Jerry Frampton. He alone knew of the big deposits of bonds on the estate. The only other person who had shared that knowledge had been found by a coroner's jury to have set his death accidentally in a window-curtain.

After his elimination he had got Jerry Frampton, weak and dissolute as he was, completely under his thumb. For the expenditure of sixty thousand pounds, advanced to meet Jerry's gambling operations, he had arranged to get the Chalcocks estate. From these valuable deposits of funds they had seen himself netting a cool million. And now this tough-looking customer from America whom Mr. Freed had mentioned seemed likely to upset all his plans.

"I'm interested in real estate," he explained, smiling with difficulty his rising fury. "I have plans for developing the property, Mr. Frampton. You know, of course, the price I am prepared to offer?"

"None! And I ain't interested. You can raise the stake as much as you like, but I'm not seeing you!"

Murder glared for a moment in Leverett's dark eyes. One life had already been sacrificed to his greed, and here, it seemed, there would have to be another victim. But in this case it wouldn't be a purely impersonal act like that of a public hangman who jetties a criminal to death. He would enjoy handling Mr. John Frampton!

"You'd better let your cousin talk to you, Mr. Frampton. You're new to England, and it's clear you don't understand the position. Perhaps you would explain it to him, Jerry? I'll leave you two together."

"That looks to me the brightest idea you've had for a long while!" Big John drawled.

He watched Leverett's retreating figure until the door had closed behind it. Then he turned quickly to Jerry.

"How do we stand, Buddy? Are you on the up and up, or do we have to fight for it?"

Jerry looked at this American cousin of his with a distant but unmingled with



awa. There was something primitive about him—something brutally simple and direct. His own position was desperate. Unless his cousin agreed to the sale of the Chalmers estate to Simon Leverett he was finished. The realizable securities, apart from the house and the land, would produce a hundred and twenty thousand pounds—and all that Simon Leverett would take in settlement of his debt. On the other hand, if the deal he had arranged went through, Leverett had agreed to let him have thirty thousand.

"I don't quite think I understand what you mean," he stammered.

Before his eyes there rose a vision of a white-haired old man whom he had seen peered, battered, and bloody, from the river. Had he lent him aid to that murder all for nothing? Was this common sense from the States to spend all his plans and leave him on the beach, penniless? A frenzy of venomous hate welled up in his heart.

"Isn't it clear enough? Are we going to split the little on sale, or are you going to make a difference?"

"It seems to me it's you who are making the difference. The property must be sold if we are to divide the estate. Mr. Leverett has made an excellent offer—a hundred and twenty thousand pounds for the property as it stands."

"What's your take off on the deal, Buddy?"

Jermya coloured.

"I get nothing out of it, of course! Mr. Leverett made the offer and it's for you and me, as the joint owners of the property, to consider it."

"Sure! But I've considered it already. I've kinda taken a fancy to this joint. I'd like to live here. You take the cash, Buddy, and I take the old ancestral home and the land."

Jermya could have struck him, but the fact that he stood head and shoulders above him and somehow didn't look the sort of man one struck with impunity, he refrained from that gesture.

"Have you got any money?"

"Not a dime but what old man Freed advanced me!"

"Then how are you going to run this property?"

"That attorney guy put me wise to all that. The way I get it from him, there's a lot of houses knocking around here belonging to the property. The guys that live in them want to have a quiet life. They pay me to protect them. You can take it from me, cousin, that there ain't nothing I don't know about that racket. Over in little New York I had over a dozen streets on my pay roll at one time."

"You're talking something about which you know nothing!" Jermya protested. "I don't pretend to understand what you mean by protection. People who live in the estate houses pay rent, and the rent they pay isn't enough to run this estate."

"It'll be tough on them when I take over them, because they'll have to part with more! Anyway, just get this, cousin—if that guy Leverett can run a racket down here which he thinks is worth investing five hundred thousand bucks in, I can do the same. He can't teach me anything, believe me!"

Jermya's nerves broke.

"You're talking like an idiot. You don't know what you're saying. It's the most utter bull I've ever listened to. You've got to sell this place, I tell you! Have you considered that I've got a say in this business as well as you—that I can refuse to let you have the property?"

John Frampton moved a little closer to

him, his clear grey-blue eyes growing hard and steady.

"Kicks getting fresh with me ain't you, Buddy? You lay off that! There ain't going to be no argument. I'm taking the house and land!"

Jermya's face was purple with fury.

"You dirty Yankee like! So you think you can bully me, do you? Well, I tell you, I won't consent! You clearly don't understand the position. I'm going to wire to Mr. Freed to come down here and explain it to you. Until then—"

He walked a little unsteadily towards the door. As he reached it he heard John Frampton's voice.

"Watch your step, cousin! And that goes for your pal, Leverett, as well! It would be sort of kind of you to hand the news on to him!"

The door banged violently. John Frampton remained for a moment standing where he was, a curious smile upon his lips. His eyes wandered to the pictures that decorated the walls, but he saw none of the portraits of his ancestors. What he saw was the face of Knut Carverhagen.

"That was a swell deal!" he muttered. "She wants a Frampton around here. Well, she ain't going to be disappointed! He roused suddenly from his dreams.

**A gun suddenly appeared in John Frampton's hand.**

"What's Leverett got on you?" he asked. "You'd better talk!"



walking swiftly to the door, he flung it open. There was a big entrance hall with the wide sweep of staircase leading up to the floor above. He gave a curious whistle, three times repeated. From somewhere came a rush of feet and a door at the far end of the hall swung open. Sleek and Hat appeared, guns in hand.

"How often have I told you to keep those rods packed in your pockets!" John Frampton protested.

"But you give us the call, boss," Sleek exclaimed. "We was just getting outside a bottle with that old guy who let us in when we heard it."

"I've got a job for you. Come here!"

He led the way back into the library and across the floor to the french windows that looked out on to the terrace. Beyond was the sweep of drive, walking down which the figure of Jermya Frampton was visible.

"See that four-flasher? He's my long lost cousin. Just watch him, will you? See who he talks to and listen to what he says!"

An ecstatic grin spread over Sleek's face. "Now you're talking sense, boss! All that high-bait uplift you was spouting on

board the ship never could get us anywhere. Didn't I always tell you you would have to attend to this job? Shall we and Hat give him the works?"

Big John looked at them menacingly. "I'll have you both on the spot if you touch him! Do what I've told you, and no more. Get busy!"

Contentedly deluded, Sleek led the way through the french windows which John Frampton had opened. Once there the two men seemed to disappear like shadows in the brilliant noonday sunshine. John Frampton closed the window and turned back towards the fireplace. As he did so he became aware of Groves standing on the threshold.

"Excuse me, sir, but I was wondering if you would partake of lunch?"

"That's the brightest idea I've heard, brother, since I came into this house. Lead me to it!"

"It can be served in ten minutes, sir. Would you wish for anything before lunch?"

"Sure! Talking to that cousin hat

made me thirsty. You can handle me a high ball, old pal!"

"An American drink, sir? I'm afraid —"

"Any old drop'll do, as long as it's short and got a snap in it. And say, where do I do it?"

"You're staying here, sir? Mr. Jermya didn't say anything about it."

"Cousin Jermya doesn't have to say anything about it! At present we go fifty-fifty in this place. Later on it'll be a hundred per cent mine!"

Groves blinked his eyes.

"Then it isn't going to be sold, sir? I understood that Mr. Leverett—"

"Forgot it! Leverett's never going to have a look in here while I'm around!"

"If I may take the liberty of saying so, sir, I am greatly relieved. There has always been a Frampton at Chalmers Manor."

He took a few steps towards the door and then halted.

"And the two gentlemen you brought with you, sir? I didn't quite gather in what capacity they were accompanying you. Will they be staying here?"

## To My Readers

WHERE do the smart guys go when it gets too hot for them in the States? They come to England—supposing they can make it, and they're got to be smart to do that. It takes a perfect organization to fade out of the rackets in the States, get hold of passports, wriggle out of one country, cross an ocean and slide into another country.

But Nick Schenk and his boys did it, neatly, slickly, and reckoned they were on to something good. Competition was practically nil in England compared with the States, and the coppers didn't carry guns. Could anything be sweeter?

What they overlooked was the fact that a certain gentleman resided at Scotland Yard, name of Xavier Knapp. His was listed as an Inspector. Actually, he was an under-cover man, better known as Mr. X. Unfortunately, he did not know that Schenk had come to London, but there was one man who did know, and that was Captain

Jago—a G-Man from the States who heard a rumour in Chicago and came over to see for himself.

Captain Jago decided to call on Mr. X, and put him wise, but Schenk had his eye on the G-Man. Jago arrived at Scotland Yard in a taxi,



Next Week's THRILLER Library will be on Sale FRIDAY, December 16th.

but he wasn't alive. What he knew he could never tell. Schenk had closed his mouth for him.

But that was enough to put Mr. X. on the trail. In fact, Mr. X. became the G-Man and vowed to get Nick Schenk if it took him all his life. And how he did it, and the amazing adventures he had in the doing of it, you can read for yourself in next week's enthralling, long complete story of Mr. X., entitled "A G-MAN COMES TO TOWN." It is written by Walter Edwards, whose work you have enjoyed so much in the past. This story is his best yet.

Make sure of your copy of next week's THRILLER Library, and don't forget that in the same issue you will have another long installment of the powerful SHADOW serial, THE GOLDEN PAGODA, by Maxwell Grant.

*The Editor*

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Fleming House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.A.

## THE SQUIRE CAME FROM SING-SING

(Continued from previous page.)

"You can let your life for they will!" John Frampton answered.

### THE PAPERS.

Heaven landed vertically, and having been shown over the house by Grooms, who was better than a guide book, John Frampton made his way into the grounds.

"I've got to get somewhere by myself to digest all these dates and histories you've been checking at me," he explained. "You must give me the low-down again sometime on that dame who gave Philip Frampton the works—you know—her they called Bleedy Mary. I don't know if I could rightly absorb any more just now."

"Will you have tea served in the library, sir?"

"Sure!" he answered, solely from a desire to gratify Grooms, for whom he had taken a liking, without a very clear idea of what he was talking about.

He was startled. It was four o'clock, and neither Schenk nor Bat had yet put in an appearance. Wandering down to the garden, which left him breathless with wonder, he strode across a stretch of park to a belt of woods. The path he was following curved and twisted among the trees. As he approached one of these herbs a voice reached him.

"Trepanning, that's what you are, in pursuit of game! You'll have to come along with me—and you'd better come quietly!"

That was a deep, husky English voice. The one that sounded was familiar enough to Big John.

"Brother, you got us all wrong! We're staying up at the house. We're friends of the boss. You tell him, Bat!"

"Sure, we're the boss' friends—come over with him first—"

"Canada," Bleck's voice interrupted. "That's a likely tale. I've found you walking about these woods, and it's my order to arrest anybody I catch."

"You ain't a boss, are you?"

There was a growing note of emphasis in Bleck's voice.

"I'm the underkeeper, and Mr. Frampton's orders—"

Big John turned the corner at that moment, finding himself almost on top of a tall man in corduroy breeches and gaiters with a sporting gun which he was holding at the ready, face to face with Bleck and Bat. John Frampton tapped him on the shoulder.

"Just which Mr. Frampton would that be?" he inquired.

The keeper spun round.

"Don't know what it's got to do with you, but Mr. Jerome Frampton, if you want to know. And just what are you doing here? Another of them, by the looks of you!"

"Forget it, big boy! And get this! I'm Mr. John Frampton, and being part owner with Mr. Jerome Frampton of this little bit, my orders are as good as his. If you want to stick on the pay roll, pipe down! There are my friends!"

"Are you the gentleman that was expected from America?" the keeper inquired seriously.

"That's me!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I was only doing my duty."

"That's O.K. by me. You keep on doing it! These boys are friends of mine, remember."

The man touched his hat, and looking a little confused, moved away among the trees. As soon as he was out of sight, Big John looked questioningly at his two friends.

"Where in hell have you heard? When you didn't come back I started to get all worked up that somebody might have phoned you."

"What, me, who can catch the pig out of an eye at fifty paces! What's been hitting you, boss?"

"Did you get the low-down on that count of mine?"

"And how! You wait till you hear, boss. It's just as I told you it would be. They got it in for you—this count, what you've got to go fifty-fifty with and that upstage dude by the name of Leverett. He's right, ain't it, Bat?"

"That's right, Bleck."

"How do you know?" John Frampton demanded.

"We shadowed him, boss, according to orders. He took us through these woods, so I was out, right to a well stuck he has on the other side of the river. He goes in at the front door, and one of them big windows being open, we slip into the house that way. We hide ourselves convenient, intending just to make sure the coast was clear. Then they comes in on us."

"What?"

"That—count of yours, sir, boss, I've glad I've no counts—they were a low lot—and this other guy I was telling you about—the upstage fellow. They sit down and they cut loose on the dope. The more they swallowed, the more they talked."

"What did you learn?"

"First, believe me, I'll tell you, boss. Leverett's got your cousin's car by damn's breath without his permission. And he's keeping him. He means to have this place. He said he hadn't gone to all the trouble of putting the guy what owned it on the spot just for nothing."

John Frampton regarded the speaker with interest.

"You must have got it wrong, Sleek. The old boy who owned this place was drowned through a dam breaking while he was fishing. Fred showed me the bit in the paper that he brought along with him."

"Yep. But it didn't tell you how the dam broke! It was a frame-up, boss! This guy, Leverett, had drowned the dam with a dose of dynamite that blew up when he gave it the juice. That's right, but, ain't it?"

"That's what he said, boss. He was kinda complaining that he'd done all the work and taken all the risk and that the other guy wanted to get out of paying anything."

"I didn't exactly lose Leverett when I saw him! So they bumped Edwin Frampton off, did they? What was the idea? Did you get that?"

"Seems as they thought, from what I understood, that your cousin would grab the lot. Then you comes along and spoils the show for them. So they got it in for you, boss."

"They have, have they? Big John smiled grimly. "What are they going to do, Sleek?"

"First—from the way they was talking. Prison, land, anything that comes handy. They mean to have you, boss—Leverett's that set on getting this place. You got to watch your step, boss!"

"I didn't say how they were going to do it, did they?"

"Naps! Leverett reckoned they were going to think out a plan and let your cousin know. The meeting broke up, a pleasant time having been spent by all, just as I was beginning to feel I couldn't be parted from something so hot and long! Say, boss, where do we sit in this fix?"

"You come along with me, Sleek, and I'll tell you what Crooks is hatching for you something. You've sure got me some useful information."

He turned and led the way back to the house. Not until they reached the garden did he speak again.

"Get this, boss! Leave my cousin out of it. I'll attend to him. You watch this guy, Leverett. I want to know where he goes and what he does, and why he's so damn keen on grabbing this job."

While Sleek and Nat were enjoying their long delayed walkie meal John Frampton held Crooks in conversation.

"What do you know of Mr. Leverett?" he inquired.

"Except that he appears to be a friend of your cousin, sir, nothing. He never called here in the late Mr. Edwin Frampton's time. It was not until his death that he came to the house. He would appear to be very friendly with Mr. Jermyn, sir."

"That so? What sort of guy would you say he was?"

"Well, it's hardly my place to say, sir, but I must admit that I don't altogether approve of his behavior, sir. He took it upon himself to give orders! I thought

it necessary to speak to the old master's solicitor on the matter, sir, when he came here for the funeral."

"What sort of orders?"

"Well, sir, for one thing he asked me to give him the key of the plate chest, and when I refused he threatened to have me dismissed."

A smile flitted about the corners of Big John's lips.

"Where's he hanging out?"

"He's staying here, sir. He and Mr. Jermyn moved into the house immediately after the old master's death. He's occupying the blue room. The door faces that of the room in which I have put you, sir."

John Frampton returned to the dining-room, where his companions were still engaged over their meal.

"Sure, I've got a job for you!"

"Here a haunt, boss!" Sleek complained. "I ain't finished eating yet!"

"Oh, there's no hurry, Sleek. There won't be no need for you to ruin your digestion! When you've got outside that lot of grub I want you to come upstairs."

Sitting on the edge of the table, swinging his legs, he watched the two men eat, entertaining them the while with some of the historical information about his ancestors which had been supplied to him by Crooks.

"See that guy over the mantelpiece? He was away with a doll who was stiff with dollars. Her brother tries to get them back, and it comes to a show-down. I guess the Frampsons have always been pretty quick on the draw, for the doll's brother got the works. And that one over there, in the funny clothes, he had his block knocked off with an axe by some dame called Bloody Mary—"

From his place in front of the sideboard Crooks looked sardonically to this Americanized version of his historical information. At last the two men had finished.



Mr. Freed was shocked by the sight of Jermyn Frampton's body. Was this his fault for bringing a gangster to Chalcombe?

"O.K., boss!" Sleek exclaimed, laying down his knife and fork with a sigh. "I'm through."

John Frampton looked at the latter.

"I'm just going to show these boys round the house. If Leverett comes while I'm busy keep him down here until I give you the A.L. Clear."

"Very good, sir."

Followed by Sleek and Nat, John Frampton led the way up the stairs as far as the first floor. There was the room, opposite his own, which had been placed at the disposal of Leverett. The door was locked.

"Snap into it, Nat!" he exclaimed.

Nat, after fumbling in his pockets, produced a length of fine steel, which he inserted into the keyhole in order to manipulate the lock. In a few seconds there was a click, and the door swung open.

Stepping across the threshold, John Frampton glanced round.

"This is where Leverett has his den. I want to give his things the once over while he's out of the way. Marie, we shall find out why he's so damn keen on grabbing this lot of property."

His two assistants began to make a rapid search through the room. Drawers, cupboards, clothes, disclosed nothing. There remained a big leather suitcase, which on Big John's instructions, Nat started operations on with his hairers. When the lid had been opened, John Frampton, kneeling on the carpet, made a systematic search of its contents. Right at the bottom he came across a sealed envelope, which without any hesitation he opened. Inside were a number of papers and a blue print map of the Chalcombe Manor estate, with a certain area marked in red. Big John considered the document with knitted brows, while Sleek and Nat watched him with something of the air of affectionate dogs.

"I wish I had given more attention to my schooling!" he exclaimed presently.

"This 'ere' got me beat. Say, have you boys ever heard of a stuff called kaelin?"

"Sure! Ain't it one of them soft drinks? I don't recollect ever having spoilt my digestion by swallowing one, but I seem to have heard of it."

Nat's suggestion was not received favourably by Big John.

"A lot of help you are. Both drinks my stuff! Here, take a look at this."

He spread the blue print on the floor.

"See what it says in that red circle?"

"Kaelin deposits?"

"Kaelin? Say, ain't that a Wop name, boss? Maybe some guy of the name of Kaelin parked some stuff he'd grabbed just there, and Leverett got wise to it, and wants to have a chance of digging it up."

Big John considered this further suggestion of Nat's in silence for some moments, and then picked up the typed document that had also been in the envelope.

"Nix!" he said shortly. "There's a lot here about this kaelin. It ain't a guy's name; it's some stuff that Leverett wants to get next to. The man who wrote this report it was worth a million."

"What are you bawling about then, boss? Leverett wants to buy this place so as he can sit pretty with that million pounds' worth of kaelin. All we've got to do is to get there first. Let's go and dig it up."

"Now you're talking sense, Sleek. Tidy up here, and let's be moving."

He thrust the papers into his pocket, returning the empty envelope to the place

in which he had found it. When everything had been made shipshape in the room again the three men slipped out into the corridor. On reaching the entrance hall they were met by Grooms.

"Mr. Jermyn's just telephoned, sir, to say that he would be glad if you could make it convenient to stop over to his house, as he has some important information to lay before you. It's the Pines, on the north side of the estate. If you would like a car, sir—"

"No, I'll walk," John Frampton interrupted. "How do I make it?"

"The quickest way is by the bridge over what was the lake, sir. It's not more than half a mile."

Armed with this information, John Frampton led the way out of the house. Once clear of observation, he took the blue print from his pocket and examined it carefully.

"This is all O.K., boys. The path takes us right past the place where all this stuff is cached. Keep handy, but don't show yourselves."

With the aid of the map, he made his way through the garden and across the path to the woods. Then minutes brought him to the ruins of the dam. Starting the edge of what had once been the lake, but was now merely a muddy channel, down which a spate of water flowed, he found the bridge. Frank was already fading. Having crossed the bridge, he found himself in the centre of a stretch of open parkland.

Here was the place where, according to the blue print, a million pounds' worth of that mysterious stuff called leadin was hidden. Big John looked around with an air of exasperation. All he could see was turf stacked with rain. If anything were hidden there, there was no sign of it. The grass had the appearance of never having been disturbed for centuries. He snatched the turf irritably with the heel of his shoe, nothing with annoyance that the leather became smeared with a deposit of slamy, white clay.

"Hell!" he muttered. "I shouldn't even know where to start digging. I've got to get this Leverett, and make him talk. Or maybe I can persuade that cousin of mine to spill the beans."

He walked on. Presently ahead of him, in the doorway of the sunset, he saw the roof and chimneys of a house.

It was darker now, as he passed into the shelter of a narrow belt of trees. Something stirred among those trees. Fronting an avenue as a car moved in his tracks. Ahead of him showed a small door set in an ancient brick wall.

Big John walked on unconsciously. Those furtive sounds became more marked. In the glow three shadows materialized among the tree trunks—the shadows of men moving swiftly in Big John's tracks.

He had reached the door. His fingers were on the latch. Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken by the roar of an explosion, followed by a human scream.

Big John lifted the latch, swung the door open, and without even looking back strode hurriedly along the garden path beyond.

#### LEVERETT'S SECRET.

WITH a white, set face, Jermyn Frampton glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece of his study. It was ten minutes to seven. Grooms, speaking from the Manor on the telephone, had told him that John Frampton had left the house more than a quarter of an hour ago. It should all be over by now.

From the decanter by his side he filled himself another stiff whisky and drained

it at a gulp. It was going to be all right, Leverett wouldn't fail. Just as he had removed Edwin Frampton, so he would take "care" of this impossible cousin who had appeared from nowhere to spoil all his plans.

Muted, but distinct, there came to his ears from somewhere outside the sound of a shot. He half got to his feet, his hand trembling so that he had to set down the tumbler. That shot Leverett! He had promised that these should be his rounds—that what had to be done should be accomplished swiftly and silently. He had sworn that he had the men who knew their job.

But that shot might bring the keepers to the scene. There would be a dead body to explain away—and the whole essence of the plan had been that John Frampton was to be put quietly out, and his body found subsequently miles away in a wrecked car.

He sank back into the chair, breathing quickly. That shot, whatever might be its consequences, had at any rate relieved him from the almost insupportable suspense of waiting. It could only mean that John Frampton had been dealt with. There would be no one now with whom he would have to share the Chalcote estate.

He poured himself out another drink. As he was in the act of raising it to his lips the sound of footsteps passing round the house reached his ears. He sat motionless, listening. Something must have gone wrong. They had come to tell him the body of his cousin had been found. One of the keepers, perhaps.

But they couldn't have anything on him! He could prove that he had never left the house. All the same, what was he to say?

He could hear the bell of the front door ring. He sat there like one turned to stone. The light footsteps of the maid were crossing the hall. His eyes became fixed on the door. It was opening. His staring gaze met the maid's astonished eyes.

"Mr. John Frampton, sir."

With a smothered cry Jermyn set down the glass and rose trembling to his feet. Behind the next figure of the maid appeared the tall form of the man whom until that moment he had believed dead.

"You sure do yourself well here, cousin. I got your call, and I came right along. Thought better of my proposition?"

Jermyn swallowed the contents of his glass. The alcohol steadied his nerves without dissipating the sense of confusion in his brain.

"Your proposition?" he exclaimed faintly. "I—I don't think I understand what you are talking about."

John Frampton dropped easily into a chair.

"You want to let up on that dope, cousin. You get my proposition all clear. You take the cash, and I take the house and grounds. Is it a deal?"

The meaning of what the other was saying seeped slowly into Jermyn's consciousness.

"I told you definitely, no. I won't consent to such an arrangement."

His voice rose shrilly.

"That's going to be tough on you," John Frampton grinned.

"I have been speaking to Mr. Freed on the telephone. I've told him of the outrageous attitude you have adopted, and he has informed me of the legal position."

"What did that old wise guy say?"

"That until the estate is divided we are tenants in common of this property. That means that all the debts are paid into an account and are held in trust until the division of the property in which we are

jointly interested takes place. As we cannot agree about the division of the real estate—that is, the land and the house—the Court will appoint an administrator empowered to divide the land between us. That may mean nothing to you, who are a stranger, but it means a lot to me. This property has always belonged to a Frampton."

"And you're so amazingly keen on a Frampton being here that you're proposing to sell to Leverett? Think again, buddy."

"At least the estate wouldn't be split up, but would remain as it always has been," Jermyn stammered.

John Frampton's eyes had taken on an odd, steady quality.

"Come clean, cousin! I'm a patient man."



up to a point, but I get all worked up quite sudden. What has Leverett got on you that he's putting the squeeze on you?"

Jermyn stared at him blankly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he gasped.

"Think again, cousin! I'm giving you a chance to talk. If it'll help you some I'll tell you that I've got Leverett placed. And get this. That old guy Edwin Frampton might go taking below a dam that breaks, but I'm not a rubber that falls for the same sort of thing."

All the blood seemed to drain from Jermyn's face.

"I don't know what you mean," he faltered. "If your suggesting that the death of my cousin wasn't—wasn't an accident?"

"Sure it was an accident! He was just below the dam fishing, and the dam broke. If it was helped to break by a dose of dynamite, it don't make it any the less an accident."

John Frampton's face in Jermyn's terrified eyes seemed to be magnified to twice its size. It loomed up through the haze of alcohol fraught with the menace of Fate. Speech for a moment was

impossible. How could this man have known what had defied the most careful police inquiries, and the most searching investigations of the coroner, who had presided over the inquest on Edwin Prampson?

"But I ain't a piker, cousin. Quit worryin' about the old guy. He'd lived a damned long time, from all accounts. And if somebody stopped on the job at the finish to make him quit, I ain't screaming. I never knew him, and his painting out has got a good thing my way. It's Leverett I'm interested in. Let's have it, cousin. What's he got on you?"

Peace, after and complete, had settled upon Jerry. In that drowsy, conversational tone the other man was talking

for yourself, buddy. I did a bit of prospecting on my own, and as I reckoned I'd take a long time to dig up all that land, I thought it'd maybe quicker to ask you."

He had taken the blue print from his pocket, and leaning forward, was holding it under Jerry's eye, a finger indicating the red circle on the plan.

"Maybe it's a guy's name; maybe it's some fancy name you have this side of the pond for gold. I'm asking you."

Jerry's brain began to function.

"Kaslin?—it's clay—drum clay. It's very valuable. There aren't many deposits of it in this country, so I've heard. But I don't believe—"

He checked himself abruptly. There within the red circle were the words "kasin deposits." In a flash it dawned upon him. So that was the real reason why Leverett had courted him, had lured him away so easily, involved him hopelessly in the net. He had known about these kasin deposits, and meant to get his hands on them.

Leverett must have discovered it. He led me money."

"Now we're getting somewhere. How much?"

"Sixty thousand pounds. I had to pay him back twice that amount."

"Just what he offered for the property. I'll certainly hand it to Leverett. He ain't got any lien on him. No air?"

He paroled the gun in his pocket.

"Say, you must be a proper sucker, cousin, to part with a hundred and twenty thousand pounds worth of stuff for sixty thousand pounds. We've got to do something about Leverett. If you want to pay him off, settle with him out of the cash that's coming to you. I don't rightly mind what you do as long as you sign on the dotted line, and the Chalmers estate goes to me as my share."

All the light had gone out of Jerry's face.

"I'll—I'll tell Mr. Freed," he stammered.

"I'll write him to-night."

John Prampson sprang to his feet.

"You sure know what's healthy for you. I'd a kind of notion, cousin, that you'd been to reason. Well, I must be getting along. Old man Coombs talked about having me come grub round about night, and I'll just hate to keep him waiting. Don't forget that letter."

He passed on the threshold of the door.

"Before I forget it, cousin, just tell Leverett—"

As he spoke the door opened, and Leverett in a rain coat, with a cap pulled well over his dark face, appeared in the gap. At the sight of John Prampson he came to a halt.

"Hello! I was just talking about you."

John Prampson's hand had slid easily to the right-hand side pocket of his coat. His grip-idea gun was watching Leverett intently. The other, who appeared for a moment breathless with astonishment at his guest's present wander from those grim features to the pallid face of Jerry in front of him.

"Indeed! You and Jerry, I suppose, have been talking over my offer?"

"We've got it all fixed, Cousin Jerry's takes the cash, and I take the land and the house."

Leverett looked quickly back at him, his dark face working considerably.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"That's plain English, ain't it? You haven't got to worry, Leverett. You won't be interested. You're slated for the skids—and you don't get any chance of dealing in real estate there."

He showed his way past Leverett.

"Well, I'll be seeing you, cousin," he called back.

Closing the door sharply behind him, he backed quickly across the hall until he reached the front door. Even then he opened it without turning round, fumbling for the latch with his hand behind his back. Then he was out in the night. As he mingled with the shadows in the drive a figure came out of the gloom.

"If you'd been another idiotic, boss, that and we would have started shooting up that shack. We saw that guy Leverett go in."

It was Steek speaking, his form still half hidden by the laurel bush from which he had emerged.

"You don't have to worry. I've told him where he gets all. Both anything?"

"Nothing, boss. There were three guys waiting for you among the trees as you come along. Maybe you saw them."

"I wasn't worrying. I had a sort of



Mr. Freed called on his client in America with a power of attorney, but his sword stick was more useful. "Don't reach for your weapons, gentlemen," he said, firmly.

"How did you know they were worth a million pounds?" he stammered.

"It's me that's asking the questions. I am wanting to know how Leverett put the spears on you. You owed him money, didn't you?"

A very library of few made Jerry get to his feet. He wanted to get away—to flee from that room, that house—to hide himself. The other's voice checked him before he had even managed to get to his feet.

"Stay where you are, cousin."

He became aware of a gun that had appeared at it by magic from John Prampson's pocket. The grey barrel was pointing at him, and he creak back into the chair trembling.

"I know nothing about the kasin.

about matters which he had imagined were completely hidden from the world. He stared back at him, his eyes in his dead grey face from pools of horror.

"Sit yourself, cousin. Let's have it. Maybe I can help you. There's something on this estate here after, and so he gets you where he wants you, and then tells you you've got to part, at his price."

Jerry's lip remained motionless.

"Ever heard of a staff called kaslin?"

Jerry passed a hand across his forehead, which was glistening with beads of sweat.

"Leave me alone, can't you?" he cried.

"Kaslin—what's kaslin?"

"That's what I'm asking you. What's this staff kaslin—a million pounds' worth of it—that Leverett's so keen on? Look

fancy there was somebody there. Somebody was using a heater?"

A doubtful expression spread itself over Sleek's plump face.

"I don't know how it happened, boss. It must have been because I ain't had any practice these last two months, but I only hit him in the hand. He was going to choke you from behind—and he dropped the club, because he was holding it with the hand I punched. Right now, boss, I'll tell you I feel pretty sore about it all."

John Frampton laid his hand consolingly on Sleek's shoulder.

"Forget it, Sleek! It was the best thing that could have happened. I don't want any stiff living about the place. From what Freed told me they don't take kindly to them round these parts. You didn't find out who they were?"

"They beat it, boss, and our orders was to watch you, so we didn't trail them. If you'd like, me and Nat will be glad to go and look for them now."

"Naps! You're coming back to the house for some world's worth wads that old man Crook's going to shake up for us. Let's be moving."

#### THE ASSAULT.

MR. FREED swung his car off the main road, opening up a narrow track bounded on one side by hush and woodlands and on the other by the wall of Chalcombe Park. His long journey from London was nearly over.

Most solicitors after two months enforced absence from their offices, would have refused to leave London until they had mastered all the problems that had accumulated during their absence. Not Mr. Freed. The telephone message from Jeremy Frampton informing him about the difficulty that had arisen regarding the division of the property that his deceased client had left behind him, had determined him to hasten to Chalcombe Manor as quickly as possible. After all, he was in a sense responsible for having brought John Frampton over from America—and it was a heavy responsibility.

In the process of lifting the last joint hair to the Chalcombe estate, and grilling him across the Atlantic he had, he knew, been treading on very dangerous ground. It was only the fact that he checked Jeremy Frampton, and detested his friend Leverett, which had induced him to go forward with a matter which to his lawyer's mind abounded with illegality. John Frampton was a gambler who had escaped from prison, where he had been paying for his crimes against society, and Mr. Freed had deliberately concealed this fact from the authorities. The methods by which he had got him out of Canada, and safely into England, didn't bear thinking of, from the standpoint of a lawyer.

But Mr. Freed was a cut-throat. There were two Mr. Freed—the eminent family solicitor, with the name of all the most distinguished families in England on his books, and the other Mr. Freed, unassociated with the world, who had a craving for adventure and excitement that was like the addict's passion for his particular drug. And this second Mr. Freed had found himself liking Sir John. There was a simplicity and directness about him which the second Mr. Freed found very appealing, though, during the six weeks that he had been in his company, he had done his best to apply to him a gloss of civilization, so that he would not appear in the home of his ancestors too blarney, and out of place.

The news that John Frampton had already quarrelled with his cousin filled him with a curiosity which he felt he



Mr. Freed was puzzled. The man who was tying up the gamekeeper spoke in a Cockney accent.

must act, and so as soon as the pretence of professional work admitted, he set off on the long journey by car. His destination was the Fir, where Jeremy Frampton had expressed the wish to consult with him about the difficulty that had arisen.

As he turned a bend in the narrow track his headlights illuminated two battered, rickish-looking cars that were parked behind some bushes close to the wall. Mr. Freed stared moodily at them for a moment, and drove on. There was the gateway of the Fir. He turned into the drive and pulled up at the front door. The house, he noticed, was in darkness. He pressed the electric bell, and that proceeding no result he sounded the knocker. Presently his patience was rewarded by the sight of illumination through the fan-light above the door.

"I think Mr. Frampton must have gone to bed, sir."

A maid, who had obviously dressed in haste, had appeared on the threshold. Mr. Freed glanced at his watch. It was not yet half-past ten, the time fixed for his appointment.

"Mr. Frampton expects me. I am a little before my time. He has probably gone out, and therefore I will wait until he returns."

Holding his top hat in one hand, and with his neatly rolled umbrella hanging from his wrist, he followed the hypochondriac maid across the hall. The next moment she had opened a door and had switched on the electric light within. Mr. Freed thanked her for her attentions with a grave bow, apologizing for having called for from her bed. The door closed behind him.

Between him and the hearth, for which he made, attracted by the glowing fire, was a settee. As he circled round this structure, he opened up the hearthrug. Instantly he halted.

There, lying face downwards, was the

motionless figure of a man in a tweed suit.

Mr. Freed glanced swiftly round the room, before approaching that figure. Bending over it, he saw that in one hand was clutched a revolver. Now, too, he became aware of a crimson stain that had dyed the rug. His eye fell upon the silver ring on the fourth finger of the hand gripping the revolver. He knew then that he was looking at the body of Jeremy Frampton, and that he was dead.

Mr. Freed's face was like a mask. Jeremy Frampton was dead, and was lying there with all the appearances of having committed suicide. But after Mr. Freed's first reactions to that discovery, his reason discarded the thought of suicide. Now he realized the enormity of the offence he had committed against Society by importing into England a notorious gangster and one of his friends. For that this was the work of John Frampton, he had never a doubt.

Behind him a curtain fluttered. He turned quickly, the lower part of his umbrella disappearing as if by magic, leaving the naked blade of a sword in his hand. He stood motionless, staring at the window, one of the curtains of which was billowing. With amazing alacrity he stepped to the left and sprang across the room. Only when he reached the curtain did he realize that there was nobody behind it—that the cause of its movements was due to the window being open.

Somebody had gone out that way, probably John Frampton and his gang after they had done their killing. Where were they now?

What was he to do in the circumstances? An ordinary good citizen would have roused the house, and summoned the police. But though Mr. Freed's good citizenship was beyond dispute he was also a family solicitor. The good names of his clients were very dear to him, and the Frampton name was likely to become dead unless he tempered his actions with

discretion. Moreover, he did not forget that it was he who had brought John Frampton across from America, and so, in the chain of circumstances, was responsible for what had happened.

He must know first, the truth regarding that dead body that was lying there on the hearth. Even though he was certain that he was looking at the handwork of Big John, the gangster, he owed it to the Frampton family, of whom he was the legal adviser, to get absolute proof before he summoned the police. The only way to do that was to secure an interview with John Frampton.

There on the desk was the telephone. He picked up the receiver and put a call through to the Manor. After some delay the voice of Greeno, the butler, oddly husky, answered him.

"This is Mr. Freed in Mr. John Frampton staying at the Manor, Greeno?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Very much so, if I may say so, sir."

There was an unwaited inquiry about the tone of Greeno's voice which established Mr. Freed, who had always found him a model of all that was decorous and dignified.

"Will you tell him that I am coming up to the house, and that I hope he will make it convenient for me to see him."

There was silence for a moment while Greeno obviously hastened to deliver Mr. Freed's message. Presently the telephone buzzed again with what sounded like a preliminary knock.

"He says, will you whip it up and come right alone, sir. He'll be slightly pleased to see you, sir."

Somewhat astonished by John Frampton's ready compliance, which he

ascribed to his brutal indifference to taking human life; and not a little puzzled by the manner in which Greeno had not bothered to translate Big John's fancy slang into ordinary English, Mr. Freed hung up the receiver.

First switching off the light, he made his way to the french windows, and stepped out on to the gravelled pathway beyond. There was, he remembered from his previous visits to the Chalcoude estate, a path connecting the agent's house with the Manor. Turning to the right, he found his way to the gate in the high gravel hedge, and passing through a narrow belt of trees, gained the open parkland beyond. A few minutes later he was crossing the bridge that spanned the low empty lake. His tall, top-hatted figure showed for a moment against the expanse of dried mud: then it had merged with the first trees of the wood on the other side.

The ground under his feet was soft and spongy, so that his progress was unsteady. As he glanced downward to make sure that he was following the track, the smell of tobacco reached his nostrils. Mr. Freed came to a standstill. Nothing was to be seen, for the darkness was impenetrable. But it was quite easy to distinguish that smell. It came from a very cheap cigarette.

He watched the veil of blackness ahead of him until suddenly he saw a faint, red glow. Without a sound he drew his sword from its scabbard, and then began to move forward to where he had seen that glow. The shadow of a bench tree trunk materialized in the gloom. Squatting with his back to it a man's figure was visible. He was leaning forward, doing something busily with his hands. What that something was Mr. Freed could not distinguish at the distance which separated them.

He moved nearer. Now he had reached the trunk of the bench tree. Peering round the corner of this obstruction, he had an unobstructed view of the stranger's occupation. Stretched at the man's feet was a motionless figure whose limbs were trussed together with straps. The man appeared to be occupied in adjusting one of these straps. Presently he sat back as if satisfied.

"You meddling veteerans," he muttered. "You come round and start kicking up a hullabaloo! I'll put the afferon on you all right!"

Mr. Freed was puzzled. According to the theory he had adopted this night to have been one of these two associates of John Frampton's whom he had vainly tried to persuade him to leave behind in Canada. But it wasn't. That was neither the voice of Block nor Bat. From his six weeks' association with them he knew he could not be mistaken.

Then who was the man? His victim was clearly one of the estate keepers. Probably he was a local poacher. But his voice had a Cockney quality which bore no relation to the Scotch prevalent in the neighbourhood of Chalcoude.

"That's quite all, my friend," Mr. Freed had stopped out from behind the tree, the point of his sword making contact with the man's throat. The other made as if to turn his head, and then feeling the prick of the steel gave a little squeal.

"I told you to sit perfectly still. Who are you, and what are you doing here? Who is the man you have assaulted and bound? I should make a point of answering quickly, if I were you."

"One of them keepers," the man

answered sulkily. "He started to get fresh with me, and I give him what he wanted."

"Stand up!" Mr. Freed exclaimed, and then sharply, as he saw the man's right hand move to the pocket of his coat: "Put your hands above your head, and turn round and face me."

The man sulkily performed the latter, and Mr. Freed thrust his left hand into the other's pocket.

"A Browning automatic? Since when have poachers gone about their felonious operations with weapons of this kind?"

"Go ahead I was a poacher?"

"I was trying to get information," Mr. Freed replied. "You had better tell me what you are doing here. From the appearance of your victim you may have committed murder, and that is a hanging matter. You have certainly been guilty of assault with violence, for which the penalty is a long term of imprisonment. Quite apart from that, I might feel myself compelled to end your worthless life unless you answer my questions."

"I was told off to stay here and stop anyone who might be making for the house."

The man's face was a grey mask in the gloom.

"Who gave you those orders?"

"The bloke what's pouring me. I dunno rightly who he is, except that he's a taff. I never seen him before to-night. Some of the boys come along, and tell me there was a job to be done, and as the pay was good I signed on."

"I see," Mr. Freed exclaimed. "Well."

(Continued overleaf)

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you will first release the unfortunate man at your feet. Hurry!"

Keeping close guard over the man, he watched him unloosen the straps with which his victim was bound.

"Fortunately for you, he doesn't appear to be dead. Place him in a comfortable position against the trunk."

When his orders had been carried out, Mr. Freed laid his left hand on the man's shoulder.

"Now we can talk. What is this job you were speaking of, that brought you down here?"

"I guess, gov'nor, honestly I don't! Some of the boys said as how I was a crin that had got to be cracked, with a lot of wedge and sparin'. Others said it was quite a different lay. But I wasn't worryin'."

"How many men came down with you?"

"There was six of us, gov'nor, and three others not so down here. There's up at the house now, along with the tuff that's paying everything. If I'd known they was going to land me with a job like this, I wouldn't have come."

Though he cross-examined him patiently for the better part of two minutes, Mr. Freed was unable to extract any further information as to the meaning of what was happening. Making the man get his hands behind his back, he used the straps that had been taken off the unconscious keeper to bind together his wrists. Then doing the same to his ankles, he turned from him without a word, and began to run along the track.

Now he was out of the wood, and crossing a stretch of meadow. There was the Manor, brooding in the starlight. Finding his way to a gate, he raced through the garden until he had reached the edge of the drive. Only then did he pass. There

on the terrace, facing the lighted curtained windows of the dining-room, were a group of nine men. Even as he watched, he saw one of these figures, who stood nearest to the window, draw back. To Mr. Freed it seemed that his arm had been in some mysterious way involved with the glass of the window. To the rear of the group, a tall man wearing a cap and a raincoat, railed his hand as if giving a signal. Instantly the whole body of men lurched themselves at the windows.

"IT WASN'T FREE!"

JOHN FRAMPTON was grateful to Grooms. What exact part a butler played in the hierarchy of an English country house, he had not the slightest idea. All he knew was that he liked Grooms.

The dinner he and Sleek and Nat had eaten had been real swell. And it had

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been no doctored dogs that had been served with it. Two magnums of champagne had produced in Big John a feeling of orderly well-being.

More than satisfied by his interview with his cousin, Big John was in an expansive mood. Not to recognize the part played by Grooms in this state of affairs seemed to him unpardonable. It was no sur-passe he declared.

"You sit down and have some of this grub," he exclaimed. "There's plenty of room."

"I wouldn't think of doing that, sir," Grooms replied respectfully. "It wouldn't be my place."

"You forget it," John Frampton protested. "Sit down and have a drink, any way. Make him sit down, Sleek."

Sleek, his mouth full, obeyed this order by catching hold of the butler's coat and pulling him forcibly into the chair by his side. Once having got him there, he filled a tumbler with champagne and thrust it into the butler's hand.

"Get outside that! Don't you hear what the boss said?"

"My best respects, sir," Grooms replied nervously.

Once started on the slippery slope of conviviality, Grooms rapidly deteriorated. The service of the dinner was forgotten,

and under Sleek's instructions he lowered the contents of one glass after another. "That's better!" John Frampton exclaimed approvingly. "Now, boy, you'd better get him to tell you the story of Philip Frampton and that dame, Moody Mary."

Grooms was quite prepared to talk about anything, but Sleek seemed to have different views.

"For the love of milk, boss, let up on that museum stuff. Let's have a game of poker."

Clearing the table with a sweep of his arm, he produced a greasy pack of cards.

"I haven't played poker since I was a boy!" Grooms exclaimed.

Nat clapped him on the back.

"You're a girl! Most guys we play poker with know too much about it. We ain't struck a real sucker for months."

The game had proceeded for over an hour, with Grooms becoming more fuddled every moment, when the ringing of the telephone reminded him of his duties. Getting clumsily to his feet, he made his way into the hall. When he returned, it was to announce that Mr. Freed was on the telephone, and wished to know whether it would be convenient for Mr. John Frampton to see him.

"Sure, I'll be mighty pleased to see him any time. Tell him to wrap it up and come right along."

Returning in haste from giving that message, Grooms picked up the hand he had laid on the table, drew a card, and found, to his delight, that he had got a full house. Suppressing with difficulty the eager smile that rose to his lips, he raised Sleek a modest threepence. Nat threw in his hand. Big John, who looted a daring bluff, and had nothing more than a single pair, raised the stake by five shillings. Sleek, glibly and decisively to "see him," Grooms raised the stake another threepence. Determined not to give way, John Frampton raised the stake a pound, and Sleek, with a groan, threw his cards in. Once more Grooms, brimming with secret excitement, added another modest threepence to the amount. Presently John Frampton sat back in his chair with a laugh.

"I ain't got no more dough, so I've got to see you."

There was dead silence when Grooms spread his hand on the table.

"And we thought you was a sucker!" Sleek exclaimed with a laugh. "You've cleared the lot of us out."

Grooms bowed in the act of drawing the killy towards him.

"I hope there's no offence, sir. If you wish to have your money back—"

John Frampton gave a whoop of joy.

"That's the first time I've ever heard of a winner wanting to part with the cash he's won. Boy, Grooms, where was you reared?"

"Cambswell, sir."

"You don't seem to get me. Never mind. Drink up, and let's have another bottle."

As the butler made to get from his chair Sleek pushed him violently back and himself brought the bottle from the side-board.

"I could listen to that story about Moody Mary now. I wished I'd returned on to the idea of listening at first instead of wanting to play poker. It's sure my unlucky day. Come on, give us the dope."

Grooms was in the middle of the

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THE INVENTOR.

There was trouble brewing in Chinatown, but just what it was no one could discover. Lemuel Cranston heard about it, for he fought crime in the guise of the Shadow. By the Chinese he was known as Ting Ko. Cranston waged an endless war on crime in the hopes of finding some trace of his son who, years before, had vanished into the underworld.

Cranston had sent one of his agents, Henry Vincent, into Chinatown to investigate matters, but he had never returned. He had, however, managed to get word to the Shadow that a Chinese gangster, named Chan Laro, was there, and wherever he appeared there was to be seen a small golden model of a pagoda.

In his black garb of the Shadow, Lemuel Cranston went to Chinatown to seek Harry Vincent. He saw the golden pagoda in the window of a tea-shop. He entered to question the proprietor, Wan Kow, but it was a trap set to snare him. Chinese henchmen swarmed from the darkness, Cranston fought his way out only just in time. From what Wan Kow told him, he discovered that Li Hoang, a Chinese bandit, was behind all the unrest, and that he had captured Harry Vincent.

Meanwhile, a financier in the City, Lorenz Kallack, had engaged a private detective, named Kavin, to trace Li Hoang to his lair. The Chinese bandit was blackmailing Kallack heavily, and the financier was determined to put an end to it, if he could.

When Kevin had gone, Kallack had another visitor. He was a thin, tall, narrow-shouldered man, whose eyes had a wild gleam beneath their heavy brows. The fellow's face was greyish, like his shaggy hair. His name was Eric Hardy, and he was an

A POWERFUL STORY OF THE SHADOW IN CHINATOWN

By MAXWELL GRANT

inventor. He was in an argumentative mood, as he leaned heavily upon a stool case.

Hardy was facing Kallack across the big desk. The inventor's lips were as scolding as his eyes.

"You are worth millions," raved Hardy. "Compared with your wealth, my royalties are a mere pittance."

"I am a good financier," responded Kallack. "You are not."

The answer didn't satisfy Hardy. He raised his head, hunching himself up from the chair.

"Why talk like that?" he demanded. "You've done well with Continental Airways, and all your success is due to my invention of the automatic pilot. Every one of your planes is equipped with it."

"True," agreed Kallack seriously. "And

for each one, you have received your proper royalty, plus a bonus."

"Of course! The contract calls for such payments. But don't forget, Kallack, you need the automatic pilot as the means to acquire Continental Airways. What have I gained from that?"

"A larger sale of your invention, with the resulting profits."

Hardy came to his feet, waved his big arms violently.

"My profits?" he screamed. "Profits, mere pittance—compared with the profits that you have accumulated! And that is not all! They say that you are worth millions." Hardy's wild eyes became cunning. "Perhaps you have used Continental Airways as a means to control other large concerns."

Hardy had struck the very truth that Kallack did not want him to know. In fact, Hardy was one reason why Kallack accepted the fact that he owned

(Continued on next page)

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held a dozen other paying enterprises. Zallock decided to soothe the inventor.

"If you want more money," purred Zallock, "I can show you how to gain it, Bardley."

"Just what do you mean?"  
"You have other inventions"—Zallock's eyes were averted—"that may have great possibilities. When you have completed them, we can include them in a comprehensive contract. That will result in new terms—a more suitable division of the profits."

A change came into Bardley's manner.  
"Will you agree to declare your total profits over the past eight years as a basis for our new arrangement?"

"I will," replied Zallock. "But I cannot do it here. My private records are at my home."

"And if I come there—"  
"I shall show you everything,"  
"How soon?"

"Any time you wish. To-night, or any other night, I am usually at home."

Bardley nodded; murmured that he would keep the appointment. Zallock smiled with him to the door. On the way, he reminded:

"Be sure to bring a model of your latest invention."

Bardley nodded. The glass in his eye told his pleasure. He bobbed through the outer office with the demeanor of a laund.

Lacie Zallock wished that he could accompany Li Hoang as easily as he had Eric Bardley. Those two men were the only persons that interfered with the smoothness of Zallock's life.

Li Hoang, however, was as difficult as Eric Bardley was easy. The Chinaman

was dangerous; the inventor harmless. The pair were as far apart as the poles. Those two problems, at least, could never overlap.

In that surmise, Lacie Zallock was wrong. Very soon, those problems would mingle, with unpleasant consequences for Zallock, the man who faced them.

#### THE ABODE OF LI HOANG.

Now night had come to Chinatown. Deep in the consciousness of that district, Harry Vincent was awake, dimly conscious of the fact that many hours must have passed since his capture.

Harry was in a darkened room, stretched upon a couch that crinkled in oily fashion when he stirred. The atmosphere was stuffy, laden with a heavy smoky odour.

A key rattled in a lock. Its silder was crooked, indicating it opened hours before the door finally opened. His hand turning slowly, Harry saw a leaning man in Chinese costume, outlined against the light of a corridor.

The arrival was Chen Laro. He was looked by two servants, huge, villainous Mongols. They awaited the bidding of Chen Laro.

Slowly the stanch Chinaman let a grin trail across his lips. He spoke rapid words in Chinese. The guards advanced into the room. Harry was too weak to resist as they lifted him from the couch. Carried by the bulky Mongols, the prisoner was taken through the corridor.

They moved along the central passage, past a succession of rooms. A turn of the corridor brought them to a bronze door. There Chen Laro lifted a copper hammer that hung by a silver chain. He struck the door a sharp blow.

The bronze door did open. Harry's captor shoved him through into a lighted room.

The scene out-distilled all fantasy. It was so strange, so grotesque, that Harry believed himself gripped by an after-effect of the drug. The floor was overlaid with rugs as deep as moss; their thick pile almost tripped Harry as he scudded forward.

The walls were adorned with carvings. Some represented ferocious dragons, others would swell gods. Only one spot lacked such hideous figures. It was the centre of the rear wall, above the level of Harry's eyes. There, in grim irony, was carved a small pagoda, its surface coated with some gilded substance.

Harry's eyes travelled down toward. They saw a gilded throne, formed from the

twisted shape of a dragon. A Chinaman was in that seat. Harry heard Chen Laro utter the name, "Li Hoang."

The man on the throne bowed. His gesture was merely a recognition that he gave to his subordination.

Harry Vincent was before the throne of Li Hoang, China's mastermind of evil.

Li Hoang was clad in purple robes. Upon the centre of his torso appeared a pagoda, woven in cloth of gold. His head wore a mandarin's rounded hat, also of purple, and with a golden plume.

Harry's eyes were riveted upon the face of Li Hoang.

That face was a deep yellow; high-cheeked and smooth. The nose was wide, but well shaped. From each side, eyes slanted up at a grotesque angle. Black eyebrows arched high above the eyes, and the lids beneath these brows remained half closed.

Li Hoang evidently had a facility for rolling his eyes without a motion of the lids. For, at times, all Harry could see was whiteness, as he met the purple-clad Chinaman's gaze.

There was another remarkable feature of Li Hoang's visage. That was his moustache. It was black, curling downward from his upper lip to form two curved streaks, one on each side of his mouth. The tips of the moustache, carefully trained, hung below the level of Li Hoang's chin.

So noticeable was Li Hoang's expression, that Harry wondered if the Chinaman's face could be a mask. That impression gripped him until Li Hoang spoke. After that Harry had no doubt that he was viewing the actual countenance of Li Hoang.

Thin lips twisted beneath the curled moustache. The chin thrust forward, teeth glistened, as Li Hoang, with a gesture, dismissed the Mongol guards.

Chen Laro stepped to the side of the throne.

Li Hoang turned whitish eyes towards Harry. They darkened suddenly between their slanted lids.

"You are one who serves the Shadow," spoke Li Hoang, in English. "To such as you, our penalty is death! There is a way, however"—the thin lips had straightened—"whereby you may shed a death that is pleasant."

Harry remained silent.

"There are facts that we seek," resumed Li Hoang, "concerning the one who calls himself the Shadow."

The Chinaman paused. Harry's face was set, his lips tight. Li Hoang knew that questioning was useless.

"Fool!" Li Hoang spat the epithet. "You cannot help but speak! There are ways, that we of China know, whereby tongues may be loosed! If you force me to such a course, your speech—when it comes—will entitle you to no mercy!"

"You will perish by a horrible death, tainted with the thought that you have spoken all that we wished to know. I give you one opportunity, only that time may be saved."

Despite his optimism, Harry managed a calculation. He did not intend to reveal a single fact that concerned the Shadow. Harry wanted Li Hoang to know that, and stubborn silence was the surest way to drive the idea home.

There was comparatively little that Harry could tell. Even the Shadow's own agents did not know their chief's identity, or the spot where his secret headquarters lay. That was part of the Shadow's policy—to protect them when they met

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with situations such as the one that Harry heard.

Li Hwang tried of the prisoner's stubborn attitude. He spoke a sharp order in English to Chan Laro. The lieutenant slid back the broom door, started for the Mangoo.

Two minutes later the lanky servants were dragging Harry from the storeroom. Chan Laro followed. Harry heard the broom door slam shut.

Headed through the bare stone corridors, Harry saw a steel door that was topped by an hourglass. The Mangoo took him along the passage that started in the opposite direction. The passage turned downward like a curve in a ramp, brought them to corridors bordered deep beneath. Next came a flight of steps, into dingy blackness.

At the bottom the guards gripped their captive, while Chan Laro stooped to raise a round slab of metal that looked like the cover of a manhole.

A few moments later Harry was using what little strength he had to fight against his captors. They were determined to shove him into that blacked hole, and they insisted, despite Harry's struggles.

Slugging through, Harry grabbed for the edges of the rounded opening and clung there. He saw Chan Laro's foot rise; the snaky lieutenant intended to drive his hand-beated foot upon Harry's gripping hands.

There was only one sure course—to let go. Harry did so, an instant before the foot had landed. He heard Chan Laro's ugly, disappointed snarl. With the sound still in his ears, Harry struck upon a stone floor below.

The blow jarred him, but not so badly as he fell the night before. Sprawled upon slimy stone, Harry managed to come to hands and knees, thankful at least, that his fingers had escaped the punishment that Chan Laro wanted to give him.

Something clamped above. It was the round hole. The last spot of light was gone from Harry's domain. On his feet, Harry could not reach the opening. It was a full three feet above his hands.

A hiss seemed to taunt him from the gloom. For the moment Harry thought that some hidden beast might be lurking there.

Then came a dimness that Harry understood. The hiss was gas, flowing through the walls of the chamber. He remembered Li Hwang's promise—that, later, he would talk. Harry understood the arch-villain's method.

That gas would make Harry even groggy than before. It would—as Li Hwang had expressed—loosen his lig-

aments. When captors again brought him to Li Hwang, Harry's game would be through.

Swaying in the center of his slant-faced chamber, Harry felt his knees give way. He had lost his sense of balance in the darkness. The slump that he took brought a thump against his head. There was a flash of starry light, then blackness.

Again Harry Vincent lay helpless, his span of life dependent upon the whim of Li Hwang.

#### CROSSED RESCUE.

THE gas drained through the depths of Li Hwang's manhole alcove. That tone penetrated even to the depths where Harry Vincent lay. It marked only a single hour, but it brought Harry from a fantasy of nightmares that seemed timeless. He realized suddenly that the gas was no longer hanging into the cell.

It seemed to Harry, however, that he was held by a multitude of invisible strands that kept him tight upon the floor. Though his mind was clear, he lacked the will to lift himself.

There was a scraping sound above. Dim light, as the cover slid away. A body worked through, dropped to the floor beside the prisoner. A heavy crept close; hands pressed a flask to Harry's lips; water reached his throat.

The effect was instantaneous. Half rising, Harry began a hoarse whisper. Words sprang to his lips. He was telling who he was, stating that he served the Shadow, when a hand stopped suddenly across his mouth.

A flashlight shone. In its glare, Harry saw the face of the person who had dropped into his cell. Again he viewed a Chinese countenance, but it was that of a girl!

The flask again reached Harry's lips. He took slow gulps, following the orders of a soft voice that whispered in his ear. Gradually his strength returned. The girl turned the flashlight across the cell. Harry saw a tumbledown cot, furnished with rough blankets and a grubby pillow.

The girl pressed the flashlight into Harry's hand, told him to turn it toward the cot. As he obeyed, Harry questioned:

"But who—what is your name?"

"They call me Ming Dwan," replied the girl. "But you must ask no more questions. Time is short!"

While Harry held the flashlight, he saw Ming Dwan arrange the cot to give the illusion that a figure lay there. She did the job well, using the pillow as a dummy. She added a shoe that she had brought with her, poking the tip of it

from beneath the blanket. That gave a final touch.

Harry stared admiringly at Ming Dwan. She had beauty such as he had rarely seen. Her face was alluring; her slanted eyes, like her eyebrows, were marvelous in their blackness. Her lips looked parted; their redness was an attractive contrast to the smooth yellow of her skin.

Ming Dwan's attire was black. She wore orange slippers, a black silk skirt. Above, she had an embroidered jacket, with high collar close about her neck. The jacket had long bell-sleeves. As she moved her hands, Harry noticed a large gold ring upon one finger.

How and why this girl was at Li Hwang's was a mystery to Harry.

The girl pointed to the opening above their heads, ordered Harry to help her reach it. Ming Dwan's nerve inspired Harry to strength. He lifted her, managed to thrust her up to the opening.

With remarkable agility, Ming Dwan reached the floor above. Scorching through, she thrust her hands towards Harry. He gripped them. With surprising strength the girl braced herself and leaped upwards until Harry was clear of the floor. He managed to grip the edge of the hole.

While Harry clung there, Ming Dwan seized his shoulders and helped him roll through. As Harry rested on the floor beside the steps, Ming Dwan replaced the cover.

Soon they were retracing the course by which the Mangoo had brought Harry to the chamber. They were alone in a maze of passages, moving steadily towards some goal. It proved to be the spot where four corridors joined. Ming Dwan pointed to the steel door with the hour-glass above it.

Before Harry could move in that direction, Ming Dwan suddenly pushed him towards a room that opened from another corridor. Harry was out of sight behind a half-closed door, when Ming Dwan, still in view, turned to greet someone who was coming from Li Hwang's door.

The arrival proved to be Chan Laro. Harry could see the twinkling smile of approval that Chan Laro gave.

The two held a conversation in Chinese. Chan Laro continued on his way. Ming Dwan waited, tense. The moment the man's footsteps had died, she was at Harry's door, bringing him out, with one word:

"Harry!"

They reached the passage to the steel door. There, Ming Dwan slinked a snarl, disappointed cry. Her fingers, pressing hard, caught Harry's sleeve and held him back.

(Continued on next page.)

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The hour-glass had dropped its final grains of sand. A change occurred as Harry stared. Some automatic device inverted the hour-glass. Simultaneously, the steel door made a half revolution to the right, working on a central pivot. The barrier was open only for a half-second.

"Too late," breathed Ming Dwan. "You must wait a quarter-hour longer. It takes fifteen minutes for the sands to drop."

"I mean wait?"

Harry was puzzled.

"Yes," Ming Dwan pointed towards the closed door. "You saw the way it acted. To go through, one must be pressed squarely against it. There is only space for one."

"But if you remain here—"

"There will be no danger. I shall pass through the door on its next turn."

Harry calculated. In fifteen minutes his turn would come. A half-hour would bring Ming Dwan's opportunity. Of course, there was the chance that Harry's escape might be discovered, but it seemed logical that the guards, not Ming Dwan, would be the ones to suffer.

Moreover, Harry realized that Ming Dwan could use the revolving door quite easily if alone. Only a few minutes ago she might have risked it, for Chan Laro thought her loyal to Li Hoang. Ming Dwan's child handicap to her own escape was the problem of Harry's departure. It would be best for him to go first, as Ming Dwan suggested.

They moved back into the room where Harry had hidden. Minutes passed. Ming Dwan seemed to cough. Harry, though she did not consult a watch. As had she looked. They went towards the steel door.

Harry saw the hour-glass. Again the upper sands were low, but there were enough to last a few minutes longer.

Ming Dwan nodded. Harry edged towards the right side of the door. As he reached it, a light suddenly glowed from a hole above. Hardly Ming Dwan again drew Harry back.

"Someone is coming from the other side!" she whispered. "The light is the signal. We cannot risk it yet."

"But that means fifteen minutes to wait," reminded Harry. "If they find that I am gone—"

Ming Dwan interrupted with a head-shake.

"It is better to wait," she insisted.

They went back into the room. This time Ming Dwan closed the door completely, telling Harry that it would serve them nothing if they waited to see who entered.

Quietly, Ming Dwan and Harry were making their best mistake when they failed to wait and see the door turn.

The last grains of sand slipped limply through the neck of the hour-glass. The mechanism acted; as the hour-glass tilted for a new run, the signal light blinked off above the door.

Instantly the sheet of metal twisted. With it came a swift-moving figure that blocked the steel shimmer of the door. With the closing of the portal, the new

arrival straightened. Motionless, he revealed himself as a figure clad in black, a slash left upon his head.

Lancelot Cranston—in the guise of the Shadow—had arrived in Li Hoang's underground realm!

As he reached the spot where passage joined, Cranston studied every nook. He saw to one, for Ming Dwan and Harry had closed their own door. That deed prevented them, in their turn, from seeing and recognizing the Shadow, the very ally whom they needed!

Now did Cranston linger at the junction point, where he might eventually have been observed by those who required aid. Taking a long slope straight in front of him, he chose it as the best route to a place where prisoners could be confined. With swift stride, Cranston glided along that corridor.

Two minutes later Ming Dwan stole forth to the spot where passages crossed. She looked in every direction—saw no one. Ming Dwan smiled; her expression, unfamiliar, was a pleasant one. Whoever had entered, had gone this way. Of that Ming Dwan was sure. She went back to tell the good news to Harry.

Again there would be a wait. After that, escape seemed sure. If chance, however, had entered to play a fateful hand. The paths of revolvers had crossed. Cranston—not the Mongols—would be the first to visit the cell that Harry had left.

That fact of the game would bring new knowledge to Li Hoang. Here, in his own realm, the master of evil men would be presented with the opportunity he wanted—a meeting with the Shadow.

#### AT BAY!

THROUGH Cranston rapidly reached the passages on the lower floor, he did not see. Immediately first Harry's vaulted cell. A chance occurrence delayed that discovery for several minutes.

In a lower corridor Cranston heard the rattled stride of approaching men. He took a side passage—blended with its depths, to watch Chan Laro march past with a small squad of Mongols.

That incident told him that these prisoners were well guarded. It also brought him other information. About to retrace his way along the passage, he heard a talking sound from another direction. He made a detour to investigate it.

A short passage ended in a square, stone-walled room. In the very centre of the floor was a tank that seethed with boiling oil. The heat from the pool was constant; it gave the proof of the fate that awaited anyone who plunged into that boiling bath.

The boiling oil represented one of the punishments that Li Hoang had devised Harry to avoid.

Above the seething oil stretched a wire mesh that resembled a huge spider's web. If Li Hoang chose to prefer a victim's death with agony, the web would serve that purpose.

Cranston observed that the contents of the mesh were provided with sharp corners. Any wild struggle in the web would surely snag the victim. Once the corners were severed he would fall, mesh and all, into the oil.

Looking above, Cranston saw a high ceiling. In it was a square-cut section that looked like a trapdoor. Through that device a person could be dropped from the room above. A rapid fall would result in almost instant death, for the web could not stand the hurrying plunge of a body if it dropped unintercepted.

There was a chance—no Cranston still supposed—that Harry Vincent had already met a doom as terrible as this.

Moving back along the passage, he checked distances for future reference. He passed again, as he measured a side corridor. He heard Chan Laro speaking to a Mongol guard.

The conversation was in Chinese. That language was quite intelligible to Lancelot Cranston. It chanced that Chan Laro was mentioning certain facts that Cranston wanted to know. The captain lieutenant was telling the Mongol that Li Hoang would soon require the prisoner who lay in the Black Cell.

The two separated. The Shadow followed the guard, instead of Chan Laro. The Mongol passed to the top of a flight of steps, passed there, then continued on his way.

Reaching the steps Cranston peered downward. In the gloom the rounded opening was hardly discernible, but it did not escape his gaze.

Quietly he cased downward, his gloved hands raised the metal cover. A tiny flashlight glimmered.

Cranston was playing against freak luck this night. His tiny light showed the cot that Ming Dwan had laid with a dummy figure. Harry's rescuer had done the job neatly, and the cot was none too clear in the beam of Cranston's light. Yet he might have guessed the trick had he been allowed a few seconds more.

Footsteps halted Cranston's survey. The Mongol was returning to the stone steps. Convinced, so he thought, that Harry lay on the cot, Cranston dropped through the opening. His fingers drew the cover into place. Clipping their air holes in the ceiling, they showed the metal door down some distance with the same move Cranston took his drop.

He had counted upon doing exactly as Ming Dwan had done—rescue Harry, and then managing a double departure. But when he reached the cot, he found that he was alone in the cell.

So far as he knew, there was but one unguarded route from Li Hoang's corridors. That was the path by which Cranston had come. He had heard it after hours of diligent search through every lair in Chinatown. Cranston doubted that Harry could have made an earlier escape. It was therefore likely that Harry—and some success—were still in Li Hoang's domain.

While Cranston calculated, he heard the metal cover being dragged loose above him. Quickly he bounded past the cot. Dropping beyond it, he waited to see what developed. The cover lifted a hole peered through. Cranston saw the glow of an electric lantern close beside it.

The arrival was the Mongol who had met Chan Laro in the passage near the steps.

The guard saw the dummy figure and was impressed by it; but there was something in the fellow's gaze that did not suit Cranston. Perhaps other guards were coming soon to bring Harry from his cell. That would force Cranston's hand too early in this dangerous game.

It was better to act even earlier. There was real opportunity while only one guard was on the ground.

Carefully Cranston crept past the end of the cot. He skirted the glow of the suspended lantern.

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## THE SQUIRE CAME FROM SING-SING

(Continued from page 596.)

historical narrative, finding more than a little difficulty in pronouncing his words, when there was an amazing interruption. It was preceded by a crash of glass and a sudden tilting of the curtains over the dreary window. Almost at the same instant—no sooner, modified brain, the movements appeared to be synchronous—the three men who had been sitting at the table with him slid from their chairs and dropped to the floor. He had just time to take so much in when the chair upon which he was seated was pulled from under him, denuding him violently on to the floor. The next moment he seemed to have been let loose in the stately dining-room of Chateau Mazer.

"Douse the lights, Sleek!" John Framp-ton's voice called.

The cluster of candles in silver sconces that illuminated the table went out in a cascade of glass, chains and plate as the cloth was yanked from the pointed mahogany. There reemerged the two electric light bulbs that flanked the side-board. Sleek's right hand showed itself for a moment above the table behind which he had taken cover. Swiftly following on each other came the roar of two explosions. The lights vanished, and the room was plunged in darkness save for the glow of the fire.

Through the open french windows eight men had rushed. Jammed together by having to pass through that comparatively narrow space, they were hampered for a moment by their own momentum; and during that brief interval the four men

who had been seated at the table had disappeared and the lights in the room had gone out.

"Chin up quickly, you look, and get out!" a harsh voice called from the terrace.

But those eight men were in the position of not knowing what they were to do next. They had been told that they would find one man, unarmed and defenceless, in that room. At the instant of

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breaking through the windows those in the front rank had glimpsed, for the fraction of a second, not only one man, but four. Now none of them was to be seen. As for the statement on which they had relied, that they would be opposed by no weapons, that was obviously untrue. Somebody in that room not only had a gun, but could use it with deadly accuracy.

The dining-room table stood between the window and the fireplace. All they could see were some overturned chairs. Of any living being there was not a sign. After the sound of those two shots an almost eerie stillness had fallen upon the room.

There was still nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. From outside came that harsh, impatient voice again.

"What is hell are you waiting for? Get busy, can't you? We've got to finish here before the servants are roused."

As if stirred to action by those words, one of the men began to move forward cautiously. He was approaching the chair, the back of which was just visible, round the corner of the table. Taking heart from his example, the others began to move. Then abruptly that ominous silence was broken by a human voice, speaking in a calm, casual tone.

"What are we going to do with this bunch, boss? Start plugging them?"

The whole advancing line halted like one man. It was utterly impossible to tell exactly from where that voice came. Even as they were trying to locate it another voice from a quite different quarter spoke.

"We don't want any stiff lying around. You was complaining that you hadn't had any practice, Sleek. Now's your chance. Give them everything except the works."

"I got you, boss."

There was a roar and a flash, and the soft fall that one of those eight men was wearing was whipped from his head. As if that shot had been a signal, eight automatics blazed aimed head across the room. There was a cascade of plaster, and the sound of splintering wood.

"Wipe it up, boys!" Big John's voice exclaimed. "These guys have got to have their medicine."

Three shots rang out, and with smothered screams of pain three men dropped their revolvers. There was a ragged reply from five automatics, answered almost immediately by three more shots. The fact that another three men had been made powerless broke the already shattered nerves of the gang. Those who were still standing upright made a wild dash for the window, those who were prone on the floor crawled swiftly on hands and knees in the same direction.

"For the love of Mike, boss, you ain't going to let them all get away with it, are you?" Sleek's voice rang out complacently.

"Yep! Let 'em go. They ain't any more than a bunch of idle slaves. I only want the guy who's standing outside. I kind of recognized his voice."

For the first time three figures materialized from behind the lustrous chairs. Big John, his body crouched, his eyes like two points of steel in the darkness, led the way round the end of the table. For the thousandth part of a second, the figures of the men streaming through the french windows were hidden by a curtain. Then, as Big John leapt to the threshold of the window he halted, gun in hand, so unexpectedly that Sleek, who was following, collided with him from behind. There, standing on the terrace, motionless, were their late attackers with their hands raised above their heads—all of them except one, who was crouched on hands and knees to the left of the window. As Big John surveyed the scene in bewilderment, from somewhere in the background came a wooden, expressionless voice.

"Stand perfectly still, gentlemen."

From the man crouched on the ground came a few breathless words.

"He's sold us!" he screamed. "If I swing for it, I'll have him!"

Big John took a leap forward, but before his hands could reach that



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crunched figure there was the sound of a shot, followed instantly by a cry. These marks with upturned arms wavered, as if about to break.

"Hold it, post!" Sleek roared. "We've got you covered from behind!"

Big John lifted the man upon whom he had flung himself low into, to his feet, knocking the still smoking revolver he was holding from his hand; then, pushing him before him round the edge of that impassive group of men, he came to stand a tall, top-knotted figure which stood on the edge of the terrace facing the fourth window, with a sword in his hand. It was Mr. Freed.

**BIG JOHN STAYS.**

"I must have known it was you. I was expecting you to join the party."

Big John's grim face had relaxed at the sight of Mr. Freed. The soldier never moved. There was no answering expression of satisfaction in his eyes.

"You have a gun I see, Mr. Prampton. You'd better give it up."

He held out his left hand. Without a moment's hesitation, Big John handed over his revolver.

"That's O.K. by me, Mr. Freed. You're pretty smart with that sword of yours, but I don't reckon you could hold this bunch of rats without a red."

He paused abruptly, his glance wandering to the motionless figure of a man in a raincoat who was lying at Mr. Freed's feet. He gave an almost imperceptible start.

"So it was Leverett to whom this guy gave the works, was it? Boy, that aches things. I wouldn't have started in so late if I'd known where he'd got the show on."

He twisted round the man he was holding.

"You sure did a good job, buddy!" he exclaimed. "You've saved me a lot of trouble, and that makes me feel sort of kin towards you. You hop it while the hopping's good."

Before Mr. Freed could interfere he gave his prisoner a shove which propelled him over the edge of the terrace. There was the cracking of shingles as he rolled down the slope, followed almost immediately after by the patter of quickly running footsteps on the gravelled drive.

"This is a matter for the police, Mr. Prampton," Mr. Freed exclaimed. "You had no right to let that man go. He has been guilty of homicide."

Big John grinned.

"What do you want to bring the dirt into it for? Ain't we taking care of ourselves? Leverett had it coming to him, anyway."

"Murder is murder. In your interests I have already gone to the limits of professional prudence, Mr. Prampton. In what I realize now was my mistaken desire to avoid a scandal, I have delayed too long. The police must be communicated with at once. You will have the politeness to send Green to me."

John Prampton had turned his head.

"Hi, Hal! Or Sleek! Find old man Green and bring him along. Make it sharp!"

There was an interval, and then Sleek's voice came from the darkness of the room.

"The old guy, I reckon, has swallowed so much dope, boss. I can't get nothing out of him."

Mr. Freed was in a quandary. Scandal, he realised, could no longer be avoided.

The police must be summoned. But how was he to communicate with them and at the same time keep his prisoners?

He resigned himself to the inevitable. After all it was John Prampton who would be wanted. These other men could be contained up another time.

"You can go," he said. "The circumstances are such that I can no longer detain you. I trust, however, that it will not be long before you are in the hands of the police."

He lowered his sword as he spoke, turning its point in the direction of John Prampton. There was a rush of scurrying feet as his doomed prisoners, hardly believing in their luck, took to their heels. In another moment the terrace was deserted save for Mr. Freed, John Prampton, and Leverett's lifeless figure.

"You'd better go inside, Mr. Prampton. We cannot talk here."

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"Sure. Come right in, Mr. Freed, and make yourself comfortable. Hal, stir yourself and let's have some light."

As Mr. Freed stopped across the threshold of the room in Big John's wake there was the scraping of a chair, and presently the lighted candles illuminated the room. The solicitor had a vision of Sleek's smiling face.

"That bunch was just a lot of trash, Mr. Freed," he exclaimed. "If the boss hadn't given the order that he didn't want any stiff lying around I could have banged the lot."

Mr. Freed looked woefully at Sleek.

"A somewhat belated act of penitence on his part, I am afraid. You will all have the goodness to sit down."

He pointed with his sword in three chairs which stood in a row against the wall. As if their one desire was to honour him, the three men sat down.

"Boy, boss, what's this going to be? A private meeting?" Sleek inquired.

Mr. Freed, with John Prampton's gun in his left hand and the sword in his right, halted immediately in front of them.

"I am about to ring up the police. You realise, of course, Mr. Prampton, that you will be charged with murder, and you two men as accessories."

For the first time a somewhat bewildered look crossed John Prampton's face.

"Horse it your own way. But just what do you think you've got on me?" he inquired.

"You called at the Fire this evening?"

"Sure I did. Cousin Jerry was phoned me that he wanted to talk to me about the division of the property."

"Yes. He went to the Fire all right, guv'nor," Sleek interrupted. "Me and that went along with him. I'm still kicking myself that I missed the guy who tried to get him."

A slight frown troubled for a moment on Mr. Freed's forehead.

"I don't think I quite understand what you're talking about."

"Don't you bother about him, Mr. Freed," John Prampton broke in. "I'm sure that he didn't get the guy who tried to catch me. He played his hand, but both he and the two guys who were with him managed to lose it. I wasn't worrying."

"But who were these men whom you tell me attempted to assault you?"

"A bunch that Leverett turned loose on me. He was meaning to wipe me out, of course."

Mr. Freed, completely mystified, decided to get back to his main theme.

"You went to the Fire, you had an interview with your cousin, and you shot him. I found his body lying on the hearthstone. You then escaped out of the window and made your way here."

John Prampton's eyebrows went up in astonishment.

"Where've you been picking up those fairy stories, Mr. Freed? I saw Cousin Jerry and we had a bit of a talk, and I told him just where he got off. I was leaving it when Leverett arrived. There was a girl shoved him into the room. He'd've bumped Jerry off then, as she'll tell you, and I couldn't have done it afterwards, because I feel it out of the house just as soon as I could get going. I'd a sort of fancy it wasn't her."

"You, Mr. and Mrs. was waiting outside," Sleek interjected. "He comes right along here, and old man Green, who's lying there, landed in some swell state. Hal'll tell you all about it when he wakes up."

For the first time Mr. Freed glanced to his right. There, stretched on his back with a lumpy smile on his face, was the butler. He drew in a deep breath.

"It seems I may have been mistaken. I sincerely hope so. If, however, you have concocted this odd, Mr. Prampton, I'm afraid it will suit you little. You had better tell me what passed between you and Mr. Jerry's Prampton."

"That's easy, I got a bunch that Leverett had Cousin Jerry in the bag. We wanted to buy his shack and the ground. He was proper mad when I told him there was nothing doing. That made me look around."

"I think if you will confine yourself to the subject of your conversation with Mr. Jerry's Prampton it would save considerable time," Mr. Freed broke in.

"That's O.K. by me. I asked Cousin Jerry what he'd been up to. He said it was chime clay, and as there wasn't much of

(Continued on next page)

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It about it was reckoned very valuable. So I told him that that was why Leverett wanted the Chalcombe estate."

"You will forgive me, Mr. Frampton, if I fail to follow what you are saying. What has he had to do with the present matter?"

"Why, everything. Have a look at that."

He took the blue-print from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Freed, who studied it with keen interest.

"Where did you get this from, may I inquire?"

"Me and the boys frisked Leverett's luggage. I'd got to get the lay-down on what he was after. Cousin Jeremy was pretty mad when I showed him that plan. It kinda made him think. So then I asked him how Leverett had got the square on him, and he said as Leverett had passed him over £200,000, and proposed to take the estate in settlement. Old Edwin Frampton being in the way, Leverett persuaded Cousin Jeremy to let him bump the old guy off. That, he thought, would leave all the property in Cousin Jeremy's hands, and he could then take it of him, together with this keakin. It'll certainly hand it to Leverett."

Mr. Freed lowered the pair of his specs to the floor and used the handle as if for support.

"Are you seriously telling me, Mr. Frampton, that your cousin and his Leverett conspired together to murder Mr. Edwin Frampton?"

John Frampton grimaced slowly.

"You've said it. But and Heck here heard them talking about it. And Cousin Jeremy as good as came close when I put it to him."

"But there was never any question of murder," Mr. Freed persisted.

"Aren't I telling you that Leverett was a smart guy? Maybe you couldn't prove it even now, but it happened all right. They got the old guy to go sitting under the dam, and Leverett blew the dam up with a charge of dynamite. It was as simple as that."

Mr. Freed fingered his chin.

"You're sure you're not committing, Mr. Frampton?"

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"Boswaring? No! You only need to know what Cousin Jeremy when I told him what I'm telling you to know that I'm speaking from the book of words."

Mr. Freed stared at him for some moments as if digesting this startling piece of news.

"And what happened next?"

"I kinda persuaded Cousin Jeremy that it would be healthy for him to sign on the dotted line and quit trying to make difficulties about handing over the land to me. Leverett comes in then, as I told you, and when I tell him what Cousin Jeremy and me had agreed on—say, was he mad? He was five million bucks' worth of keakin going down the drain. He would have killed me there and then, only I was watching him. And as I watched him good-night, and best it."

John Frampton took a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

"I guess that when I left Leverett and Cousin Jeremy alone they had a shake-down. Leverett saw it wasn't healthy for him having me around here, and that

the sooner he could give me the works the better. I might start telling the story about the dam, and I was certain also not to part with the keakin to anybody. So he got together that bunch of fast-fishers, beats in here and tries to shoot me up."

Mr. Freed took from under his hat the lower portion of an umbrella, in which he absented his wand.

"You cannot avoid bringing shame and disgrace on the honorable name of an ancient family, I am afraid. But for story, Mr. Frampton, places a very different complexion on the matter from what I had imagined. Mr. Jeremy Frampton either committed suicide or was murdered by Leverett. As Leverett had nothing to gain by his death—indeed, he had everything to lose by it—3 lakins to the suspicion that after Leverett had left him, the horror of his position dawned upon your cousin, and he took his own life."

He passed a hand across his forehead.

"It will now be my duty to communicate with the police. But before I do so, I must ask you gentlemen to hand over your guns."

Click and that appeared to cover this suggestion. Big John turned on them.

"You boys have got this country all wrong. You can't go around with beaters here. When the dicks start asking questions forget that you've ever known a gun. If they was to find one on you you'd be shot for the skills. So park the artillery, as Mr. Freed's telling you."

From the floor came a loud store.

"And then," Big John added, "throw some cold water over that old guy, so he'll be able to answer questions when the dicks arrive."

It was not until late the following afternoon that the preliminary police investigations, carefully stage-managed by Mr. Freed, were completed. To protect the name of the Framptons, by shirking Jeremy Frampton, being out of the question, nearly the whole truth and nothing but the truth was told about him. The part Leverett had played, too, was made clear by the discovery of the papers regarding the keakin deposits in his name. (Mr. Freed had seen to it that they had been returned.) Only one material point had been suppressed. No mention was made of how Edwin Frampton had met his death.

"And now, Mr. Frampton, that the whole of the property is indisputably yours, what do you propose to do?" Mr. Freed inquired.

A far-away look came into John Frampton's eyes.

"I gotta make a date with the devil, and who drove me from the depot, and made her live at the Red House. She told me she wanted a Frampton to stay around here, same as they had been doing for centuries, and I got to let her know I'm staying."

THE END.

(Let the Editor have your opinion of this story. You will find his address and full details of next week's grand "Mr. X." story on page 288.)

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