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NEXT OF KIN

A LONG, COMPLETE STORY OF Mr. PREED—The Man with the Sword-Stick



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NEXT OF KIN

Chapter I. THE WAITING GAME.

OUTSIDE the shadows were deepening, as that the glow of the shaded lamp at the side of the bed seemed to grow brighter every moment. In that bed, which with its tapestried hangings had once belonged to an emperor, lay Sir John Hartland, the great steel magnate.

He was dying, and he knew he was dying. Life was seeping away from his frail body like water out of a damaged bucket.

He stared up at the lampshade over the bed, from which was suspended an electric bulb. But he did not see those things, nor the microphones which they so cunningly concealed. What he saw were pictures of the past.

He was a young man again, eaten up with ambition, and desperately in love. Out of the mists of memory rose the face of a girl.

How he had loved her! Jean—and she had turned him down for a temporary-halterless clerk who had never earned more than four hundred a year in his life! Mrs. Jean Weston—a widow now with one son, living in a small suburban villa, resigned of being mistress of Hartland Manor and wealth, which only the Inland Revenue would correctly compute when he was dead.

Pretty little Jean, so beautiful on an April morning—so foolish—so self-willed. How her dark hair must be tinged with grey.

"Mr. Smart is here, sir."

His Butler had softly-tottered entered the room. Sir John Hartland turned to his eagerly.

"I told you to show him up at once."

As automatically as he had come, the butler left the room. On the landing outside a tall, clean-shaven young man was waiting. The butler looked at him for a moment, nodded meaningfully, and continued on his way downstairs. The young man turned quickly and, opening an adjoining door, slipped into the room beyond. Once inside, having looked the door, he dropped into a chair near the window, took a pair of headphones from behind the curtain and clamped them to his ears.

There was a long pause. Suddenly the microphone gave a preliminary buzz and the voice he had been waiting for came across the wires.

"Get that address, Smart?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. BRITON, 27 Berkeley Road, Wiggins, London, S.W.2. She's been living there ever since her husband died five years ago, sir."

"Dead, is he? I wonder what he left her? I'll bet it wasn't much."

There was an eloquent note in Sir John Hartland's voice.

"What sort of place is it, Smart?"

"Poshish, sir. About forty pounds a year houses."

There was a long silence and then at last Sir John Hartland's voice again.

"You've not talked to anybody, Smart? Nobody except yourself knows anything

AN ENTHRALLING, LONG
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—THE MAN WITH THE SWORD-
STICK

By
**LADBROKE
BLACK**

about these jobs I've asked you to do for me?"

"I never talk about my business, sir."

"Good. I asked you that because if my nephews knew you'd been collecting information about him—and the sort of information you'd dig up—he might be in a hurry to see the last of me. You see, Smart, he's my only living relative. If I die without making a will he'll collect a million pounds."

Beneath the headphones the young man's face grew of a sudden very set and strained.

"I've got to make that will, Smart. All this wealth I've worked for, I just couldn't bear to think of it going to the rogue and waster my nephew Alexander is. Ring up my solicitor, Mr. Freed, of Munton & Freed. You'll find his number in the book. Not his office at Lincoln's Inn, Fields. He'll have left there by now. Get him at his private address, Grosvenor Mansions. Tell him it's urgent."

There was an interval, while across the wires came the sound of Smart's voice, muted and indistinct, talking on the telephone.

"He says he's very sorry, sir, but it's impossible for him to get here until ten o'clock."

"That's too long, I don't risk it, Smart. I know I haven't long to live. I must try and make the will myself. Find a bit of paper. I'll dictate it to you."

As he listened the young man's hands tightened convulsively on his knees.

"Ready, Smart? This is the last will of Sir John Hartland, Knight, of Redlands Manor in the County of Bucks. I devise and bequeath to Joan Briton, of No. 27 Berkeley Road, Wiggins, London, S.W. 2, all my real and personal estate and effects of every description for her sole and separate use absolutely. And I appoint the said Joan Briton as the sole executrix of my will. Get me

Whitaker's Almanack from the bookshelf, Smart."

Again a few moments' silence, followed by faint, far-off sounds as of somebody impatiently turning over the pages of a book.

"Yes, I know it was here. You've got to get the attestation clause right. Get this down carefully, Smart. It's important. I don't mean to leave any loophole for that young scoundrel to get his fingers on my money."

Sir John Hartland's voice came clear and distinct as he read slowly from the pages of a book.

"Signed by the testator in the presence of us, both present at the same time who in his presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto set our names as witnesses." Let me have a look at what you've written."

There was a pause of nearly a minute. The young man with the headphones passed his handkerchief across his sweating forehead.

"Yes, that's all right. . . Now we shall want another witness, Smart. You'd better get the name. I don't trust anybody else. Alex may have bribed them. Put the curtains first, Smart, then go and find the name. If I manage to hang on until Freed comes he can attend to this business and make it all sound and proper. This is just a precaution in case anything happens to me."

The young man tore the headphones from his ears and, getting to his feet, bolted from the room. Avoiding the main staircase he sped down the back stairs. A side door admitted him to the grounds of Redlands Manor.

The last of the sunset was already fading from the sky as he raced across the corner of the elaborate gardens and gained a path beyond. Four hundred yards brought him to the shelter of some woods. Among the trees the darkness was profound. Like a shadow he glided

down the tobacco track. Abruptly ahead of him rose the vague outline of a keeper's hat. From a shaded window there came a faint glow of light. He pushed a door open, and stumbled headlong into the room beyond.

The men were seated at a rickety table engaged in a game of cards. At the sound of his entry the man facing the door looked up.

"Everettin' hunky-dory, Alex?" he inquired. "Ain't the old guy passed out yet?"

Closing the door, Alexander Hartland sank down in a chair at the head of the table.

"It's all come unstick, boys. While I've been thinking I was his white-haired nephew and the apple of his eye he's been having private inquiries made about me. He's got the whole low-down on my past. Had a private detective called Smart on the job."

The two men dropped their cards and looked at him aghast.

"Now's he taking it?" the man who had not yet spoken inquired anxiously.

"How do you think he's taking it?" Hartland snarled. "He sent for his solicitor—somebody called Freed. As Freed can't be along till ten o'clock he's already drawn up a will which is being signed at this very moment and witnessed by that blasted detective Smart and a nurse. He's left everything to a widow called Joan Brison, who lives at No. 2, Eastern Road, Wingapore, S.W.16."

The two other men looked blankly across the table at each other. The one who spoke with an American twang at last broke the silence.

"It sure looks bad, Alex? An hour ago you were sitting pretty for almost five or six million bucks and now, from what you say, a dame by the name of Brison is going to collect the kilt?"

He rubbed the back of his head. "We've got to get busy," he said presently. "This dame must be cleaned up. Once she's been given the works she can't collect. That's the way it goes, isn't it?"

Hartland made no answer, but sat staring at the table, his hands clasped and unclaspng convulsively.

"Say something, don't you, Hartland," the second man, who was dressed with a certain elegance, exclaimed at last. "Don't forget that Slim and I have got a stake in the business."

There was a very threatening green on the man's lips. Hartland glanced at him nervously.

"I'm forgetting nothing. I promised you both ten per cent. But what you stand to lose is nothing compared with what I'm to be done out of. A million quid! It's going to this blasted woman in Wingapore if we can't think out some plan. But it's got to be a foolproof plan, that's not going to land us all in jail."

Stammering gave his shoulders a shiver. "If you've any proposition to put before us that suggests a prospect of our landing our respective nine-ohs, we'll listen. Nobody can say that Slim and I aren't broad-minded."

Alexander Hartland began to drum a devil's tattoo on the table with his fingers. There was a long pause while the two men watched him furiously. Suddenly he threw up his head, his face oddly flushed.

"In his present condition my uncle couldn't stand a shock. We've got to apply that shock and apply it quick. This is a job for you and Slim, Stenning. I've got to keep out of it in case there's



any awkward questions asked afterwards." "I rather thought your proposition would include a clause for all the dirty work to be left to us," Stenning sneered. "But sorry, no."

"Bring it, what do you want to talk like that for? If I was suspected of hastening my uncle's death I shouldn't be allowed to collect a bean. Nobody may benefit by poison. That's the law. And if I don't collect, you don't get anything. That's why I've got to keep out of this business."

"Alex is sure talking horse-stick," Slim interposed. "Go on, give us the dope, Alex!"

"All you've got to do is to get into his bedroom. You can reach the window by a ladder. The curtains are drawn so he won't see you until you spring out on him. You needn't touch him. When he sees your game he'll have all the shock he wants."

"That sounds a swell scheme to me," Slim exclaimed enthusiastically.

"But what about this will you say he's already drawn up?" Stenning objected.

"After his death you'll have to find that and destroy it. Then I inherit as next of kin."

"You're forgetting something, Alex," Stenning retorted smoothly. "Forgive me if I seem a piker, but didn't you say he was going to leave this money smart, smart, and the nurse to witness his signature? Even if the will's destroyed they'll be there to swear that he drew up the will and that they witnessed it."

Slim took a deep breath and rose to his feet.

"Now's it's going to be just too bad for the nurse dame? I'm kind of soft about nurses, ever since I was shot at by the cops and rushed off to hospital. But that's the way things go! Sentiment can't be allowed to stand in the way of collecting a wad like five million bucks. As for this hyslop guy, Smart, I'll be sure a pleasure to attend to him."

"How are you going to do it?" Alexander Hartland asked nervously.

Slim clapped him on the shoulder. "You say knowing nothin', buddy! I'll be healthier all round. As you said just now, you're the guy that's got to collect before you can pass on anything to us. You know nothing, and nobody can pin anything on you! You just tell us where this guy Smart lives and where rascal hangs out."

"The nurse always sits up with my uncle during the night, Smart lives in Pinelico. He has a house at No. 2 Eastern Street."

"Good enough! We'll attend to them both for you, Alex. You beat it now! Keep quiet indoors until it's all over."

Alexander Hartland got to his feet, jerking up his hand as he did so to shove at his wrist-watch.

"It's half-past eight. Don't forget that this fellow Freed, the solicitor, is coming at ten."

"That suits me. I always believe in being a quick worker. We'll administer the shock to the old man, collect rascal on the sly, and then look up this Smart guy. Come on, we'd best be moving."

THE SOLICITOR GETS BUSY.

MR. FREED, of Mason & Freed's, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, pulled up his car in front of the steps leading up to the main door of Redburn Manor. Slowly he walked up the steps—a tall, top-hatted figure in a well-cut, morning coat, a neatly rolled umbrella in his right hand. He seemed the very embodiment of everything that is meant

"Send for Mr. Freed!" ordered Sir John. "I'm going to alter my will!" And downstairs, listening to it all by means of the cunning microphone he had fixed up, was his next of kin.

by the words "dignity" and "respectability."

"My name is Freed, of Manson & Freed. Sir John Hartland promised that he wished to see me."

The butler bowed him into the large entrance hall and made a movement to return him to his top hat and umbrella.

"I thank you, sir!" Mr. Freed exclaimed woefully. "You will oblige me by taking me to Sir John at once."

Awed by the visitor's manner and his wooden, expressionless face the butler conducted him up the grand staircase. Mr. Freed followed in his wake, his footsteps making no sound on the deep-piled carpet. Arriving on the first floor the butler opened a door.

"Mr. Freed, sir," he exclaimed.

Holding his top hat and his neatly rolled umbrella in his left hand, Mr. Freed stepped across the threshold. Behind him the door closed rotatably.

He now before him a vast room. An electric fire glowed in the hearth, immediately opposite on the far side with an immense unoccupied bed. By the side of the bed, resting on a small table, was a shaded lamp which afforded the only illumination in the room.

Mr. Freed walked solemnly towards the bed. A figure was lying there with his back towards him. Mr. Freed gave a little cough to indicate his presence.

"Good-evening, Sir John!" he exclaimed.

There was no answer. The figure lying there was curiously motionless. Mr. Freed halted by the bedside, and bent forward a little as if to inspect the face of the man lying there. The next moment he had drawn himself erect and, turning quickly, had crossed the floor to the door. There he pulled down the switches of the electric light.

The shadows of the room scattered, leaving everything clear-cut and distinct in that glare. Mr. Freed moved swiftly to the far side of the bed. Now he could look directly into the face of the man lying there.

It was an old, lined face. The mouth was half-open, the upper lip drawn back from his teeth, almost as if he were in the act of crying out aloud. From under the bushy eyebrows a pair of wide-open eyes stared out. But those eyes were dead and glazed.

Mr. Freed knew that he was in the presence of death, but instead of instantly summoning assistance he continued to stare back into those wide-open eyes. Something in those eyes held him spellbound. Something in that old, grey, stiffened face gripped his attention.

There was fear written in those eyebrows and alarm in that wrinkled forehead. Sir John Hartland was dead. For weeks now the world had been expecting him to die. How now had he come to die with those stigmas of horror imprinted so clearly on his features?

Very gently Mr. Freed drew back the bedclothes. Beneath the sheet the dead man's limbs were drawn up almost as if he had been in the act of trying to struggle from the bed when death had struck him. His left hand was pressed to his heart as if at the last moment he had realized that that organ was failing him. Without touching the hand Mr. Freed examined it. It was, he saw, clutched tightly at the pocket of his pyjama jacket. Protruding from that pocket was the end of a handkerchief.

Mr. Freed touched the handkerchief with his finger, thinking that he would use it to cover the dead man's face. As he pulled out the linen, something else came

away from the pocket. It was a piece of paper, folded and crumpled.

Mr. Freed unfolded the piece of paper. As usual his wooden, expressionless face displayed no emotion, though in actual fact he found the document at which he was staring startling enough.

It was Sir John Hartland's will, drawn up in simple form. According to its terms all his vast fortune had been left to a certain Joan Britton of an obscure address in a London suburb. It had been duly signed and witnessed by Joseph Smart, private inquiry agent, No. 3, Eastern Street, Finsley, and Elizabeth Vane, nurse, of the Harrington Nursing Home, Winter Street, W.

One other fact he noticed. The handwriting of the will was identical with that of one of the witnesses, Mr. Joseph Smart, of Eastern Street, Finsley.

When the will had been drawn up and signed there was nothing to show, in direct evidence suggested, however, that it must have been executed during the testator's recent illness, from the fact that one of the witnesses was a nurse.

But his business at that moment was not concerned with the testamentary dispositions of his late client. He looked again at that shocked, twisted face. Sir John Hartland had been long looked for the "last jump," but something had happened in that room to hasten his passage from the world of the quick. And what could have happened?

There was another Mr. Freed unaccounted for by the world—and the Mr. Freed, the eminent family solicitor of Lincoln's Inn Fields—who had a passion for adventure; and that Mr. Freed had now come upon something. Rightly or wrongly he suspected that something was afoot. Perhaps he wanted to think something was afoot.

Turning away from the bed he examined the room. Drawn up close to the electric fire was a chair, by the side of which there rested on the carpet some knitting needles, a half-finished jumper and a ball of wool. Presumably those had belonged to the nurse. And where was the nurse now, and why had she deserted her patient?

He made his way to the window. The heavy curtains were drawn close, but he drew them aside and looked out. He had a view of the gardens, vague and indistinct in the night, and beyond, a stretch of woods. The bushes of the window were closed, but the catch was not fastened. He examined the catch. As he did so he made a discovery. The metal side of the catch had been scratched as if by a sharp instrument. He pulled up the window so that the lower edge of the upper pane became visible. Just beneath the catch the pane was badly scratched.

Mr. Freed went on his knees and, thrusting his head and shoulders through the window, peered down into the garden. The ground beneath was composed of some form of turf-moss which would leave no impression. He drew back and closed the window. Somehow, somebody had made their entrance through that window, forcing the catch with the fine blade of a knife. Of that he was positive. But who had done it, or why they should have done it, he had not the faintest idea!

Stepping back into the room he rang the bell. A few moments later the butler appeared.

"Your master is dead," he said gravely. "You had better ring for the doctor immediately. Then have the goodness to come back here."

Mr. Freed's voice was devoid of all emotion. He might have been announc-

ing the fact that there was a draught in the room to which he wanted the leader to attend. The man started violently and then gave one scared glance at the bed.

"Shall I tell Mr. Hartland, sir?" he gasped.

"Follow the instructions I have given you and then return here."

He waited, a model of patience, in front of the fire, until the butler returned.

"The doctor's coming at once," the man explained in a low voice.

"Thank you," said Mr. Freed. "Sir John has a nurse in attendance on him. She had best perhaps be summoned."

The butler looked hurriedly round the room.

"That she ought to be here, sir. She came on duty shortly after eight. Sir John and Mr. Smart for her."

"And who is Mr. Smart?" Mr. Freed inquired woefully.

"I don't rightly know, except that he was doing some business for Sir John."

"You had better go and find the nurse and tell her what has happened. By the way, you mentioned just now Mr. Hartland. That would be Mr. Alexander Hartland, Sir John's nephew, I take it? Has he been staying here long?"

"For the last six weeks—ever since the master was taken ill, sir."

"You, obviously he should be told. He's downstairs, I suppose?"

"No, sir, he went to bed shortly before nine. He wasn't feeling very well. I was to call him if the master took a turn for the worse."

The door closed behind the butler and Mr. Freed was left alone once more with the dead man. Standing motionless in front of the fire his eyes wandered from the bed to the window, from the window to the empty chair by the side of which the half-finished jumper lay, and back to the bed again. Something had happened in that room—something sinister! He was certain of it.

Already he had established one fact from his recent conversations with the butler. Sir John, either alarmed at his own condition, or fearful that his solicitor might not keep the appointment, had dictated a will to Mr. Smart, the inquiry agent who had called on him that night on some business. Smart had then been sent to fetch the nurse, Elizabeth Vane, to witness the signing of the will. The document, after being formally completed, had been taken possession of by Sir John almost as if he had been afraid that it might be stolen. He crumpled condition suggested that he had thrust it into the pocket of his pyjama jacket and had then drawn overlock him. His hand had been clutched that pocket, as if to guard the document, not, as Mr. Freed had at first assumed, because of some heart ailment.

The door opened abruptly, interrupting Mr. Freed's reflections. A tall, dark-faced young man in dressing-gown and slippers came into the room.

"It isn't true, sir! It can't be! Williams said my uncle was dead."

"Mr. Alexander Hartland, I presume, I'm Mr. Freed, your uncle's solicitor. The doctor's not yet seen your uncle, but I'm afraid there's no doubt that he's dead. I found him as he is now when I was shown into the room."

Alexander Hartland moved towards the bed and, clutched one of the pillows, stared down at the motionless figure lying there. Presently he turned again to Mr. Freed.

"Of course, we've been expecting this for weeks; there never was any hope of the old man's recovery; but all the time

"It's a bit of a shock now that it has come."

"Naturally!" said Mr. Freed.

He gathered up his hat and neatly folded umbrella.

"You would wish to be left alone, I imagine, Mr. Hartland. I've sent for the doctor and he should be here any moment now. I will wait downstairs in case you wish to see me."

Out in the corridor he came face to face with the butler.

"The nurse has gone, sir. When I went to her room just now it was empty. And she's taken her valise away, together with all her things."

"You had better report this gross dereliction of duty to the doctor when he comes, and he will doubtless take the necessary action. I shall be in the library if anybody wants me. I know the way."

Once in the library with the door closed Mr. Freed switched on the lights and made straight for the french windows. A few moments later he was standing immediately beneath the window of the room in which Sir John Hartland had died. One glance at the iron surface of the terrace parapet, which at this point stretched to the wall of the house, told him he was wasting his time. He could expect to find there no traces of the person or persons whom he was satisfied had forced the window of the bedroom.

For a moment he stood with his back to the house, staring out across the gardens at the woods beyond. In the middle of her duties, Nurse Vane had decamped. Seated quietly by the electric fan, engaged in knitting a jumper, she had been suddenly seized with the idea of leaving Holland's Manor at once. Dropping her knitting to the floor, she had hurried off to her own rooms, packed her things, and left the house.

That was what a logical deduction from the ascertained facts was asking him to believe! But he didn't believe it. Had Nurse Vane taken her half-finished jumper and left her other things in the room, Mr. Freed might have accepted this explanation of her conduct. But knitting fairs—so his experience told him—would as soon be parted from the products of their looms as a philatelist from his stamps, or an invalid from his favourite pillow.

Nurse Vane had gone—vanished! And Nurse Vane had been one of the witnesses of Sir John's will. The other witness was Mr. Smart, of Lantern Street, Finsbury.

Mr. Freed became abruptly violently active. Instead of returning to the library he raced back to his car. It was then, he saw by the clock on the dashboard, half-past ten. Driving at a reckless speed he reached the confines of London shortly after eleven. It was not yet half-past when, winding his way from the neighbourhood of Victoria Station, he pulled up at Lantern Street.

The ground floor window of No. 5 was a low one. Across the lower portion of the entire glass was a wire frame bearing the legend: "Smart's Private Inquiry Agency." Mr. Freed, according to the short flight of steps, was looking about for a bell when he made the discovery that the door was slightly ajar. No notice being taken of his ringing, he pushed open the door.

From the light that came from a neighbouring street lamp he could see a narrow passage. At the far end there was something lying on the floor—a grey,

tumbled mass that stood out from the prevailing gloom of the shadows.

Mr. Freed stepped across the threshold and moved towards the end of the passage. There was a man lying there—a man of about forty-five, dressed in a well-worn blue lounge suit. Mr. Freed struck a match and, stooping down, examined the figure. The little flicker of yellow flame dragged from the darkness a thing of horror.

The whole front of the man's face had been blown away, leaving a terrible, mutilated mask. A pool of blood had formed on the stained linoleum where the shattered head was resting.

There was no change in Mr. Freed's expression. His features were as wooden and as unresponsive as ever when he knelt by the man's side and began to examine the contents of his pockets. The sheet of letters which he took from the inside of his coat told him all he wanted to know.

There lay the body of Josiah Smart, private inquiry agent, brutally shot down in the entrance passage of his own house. Elizabeth Vane, one of the witnesses of Sir John Hartland's will, had vanished. Josiah Smart, the other witness, had been murdered.

Mr. Freed drew himself erect, leaving his chair. Nobody except himself knew of the existence, as an absolute fact, of that will. But somebody suspected that it had been drawn up. The vanishing of one witness and the death of another were coincidences that could be explained in no other way.

Whoever was behind this murderous conspiracy must be counting on the fact that the will, if drawn, would never come to light, or, if it did come to light, would be destroyed. But if they didn't find the will—as they wouldn't, seeing that it was in Mr. Freed's pocket—what would be their next step?

Sir John Hartland had left everything he possessed to Jean Briton at an address in Wingate. Mightn't she be the next victim—mightn't she be the next witness—mightn't she be the person behind this monstrous conspiracy? Imagine that by her removal the will could be made inoperative, even if it did come to light! Laymen, he knew, had the most extraordinarily erroneous views about the laws of inheritance. It would never occur to them that Sir John Hartland, having left all his property to Mrs. Briton, her next of kin, if anything happened to her would inherit. This Mrs. Briton, who was quite unknown to him, might at this very moment be in deadly danger.

As what thought took possession of his head, Mr. Freed turned and, hurrying out of the house, made for his car. In a few moments he was speeding southwards in the direction of Wingate.

MR. FREED FINDS OUT.

THE glare of arc lamps lit up the roared-in square. A little plump man in a dinner jacket stood in the corner, peering over a half-made figure lying stretched there on the corner. His right arm rose and fell.

"Eight—nine— Jimmy Briton, the winner!"

From the packed house came a roar of cheers. The young man, who had been standing in his corner while his opponent was being counted out, helped to carry his still half-conscious victim to his chair. Then, creeping from his trainer and second, he ducked under the ropes and raced down the gangway to his dressing-room. The dim light of a girl rushing towards him as he gained the door.

"Oh, Jimmy darling! You were wonderful! When I saw him I didn't think you had a chance! I was almost sick with terror! And you finished it in two rounds!"

With his gloved hands he caught her under the arms, lifted her off her feet and kissed her on the lips.

"Do you mean to say, Mrs. Briton, that you thought the man you married this morning was going to be beaten? That's a nice attitude for a wife!"

She flung her arms around his neck.

"You darling, darling Jimmy! But you must let me go because I've got to go and cook our supper."

"Sure you haven't lost the key mother gave you?" he inquired with a grin.

"What do you take me for, Mr. James Briton? Before your mother left she showed me everything. How long will you be?"

"Say half an hour. I've got to have a ray down, and my manager will want me to talk to the Press, I expect. You can bet I won't be longer than half an hour."

After another kiss, Sally Briton hurried out of the hall into the street. No girl, she reflected, had ever had such a wonderful wedding day. In defiance of all the rules, without the knowledge of his manager or his trainer, Jimmy Briton, applicant for heavyweight honours, and she had been married that morning—on the morning of his most important fight! And he had won that fight in the second round, winning with it a purse of two hundred pounds! Enough to pay the expenses of their honeymoon and the little home they dreamed of!

Ten minutes by train brought her to the corner of a typical suburban residential road. She made her way down it, past dozens of houses all exactly alike. She was looking for No. 37, the house in which Jimmy's mother had been taken as a bride and which she had now placed at the disposal of her son and his wife.

It was, she knew, already after midnight. Jimmy's fight hadn't come on until after eleven. There was No. 37 at last. As she opened her husband to find the key that Jimmy's mother had given her, she noticed that a car was drawn up alongside the pavement. As she hurried into the gate the figure of a man materialised from the shadow of the porch.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Briton?" he inquired in an accent which reminded her of an ambassador of the west.

Sally gave a little self-conscious laugh. That morning she had walked as Sally Blomster. She hadn't got used yet to being addressed as Mrs. Briton.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Briton—Mrs. James Briton," she answered.

It must be some Press man who had discovered the address of Jimmy's home and come there determined to interview him. It would be rather fun to give him a story! On the other hand she had to cook Jimmy's supper. Perhaps she could talk to him while she was doing the cooking!

"I don't expect it's me you want to see, but if there's anything I can tell you, and you care to come in—"

"It's certainly most kind of you," he replied.

She opened the door with the unfamiliar latchkey and stepped into the passage beyond. The man followed her. She felt along the wall for the electric switch. As she did so, out of the darkness big, powerful hands closed upon her throat. Consciousness was severed instant-

her mouth and nose. She tried to scream, but no sound came. She struggled wildly.

A shadow crept across her brain. Through the darkness her terrified eyes looked up at two points of light that glowed dimly. She couldn't even struggle now.

If only Jimmy were there—Jimmy who was so strong—whose great face would have made short work of this brute. The figure of Jimmy, as she conjured it up on the screen of her mind, was the last thing of which she was conscious for a long time.

In the dressing-room of the huge hall where that night's fight had been staged, Nat Gurney, manager and trainer, gave Jimmy Britton's abdominal muscles a final reconnoitering smack.

"O.K., kid! Slip into your slacks and we'll go and celebrate. I've got to swallow something to the future heavyweight champion of England."

Jimmy Britton slipped from the couch, where he had had to submit to Nat Gurney's professional attention. He had looked to all the congratulations, talked to the Press, and now at last he was fit to go to bed.

"Nat, I've got something to tell you," he exclaimed, beginning to drag on his clothes. "I can't come out with you to-night. My wife's waiting for me."

Nat Gurney's old battered face wore an expression of utter bewilderment.

"Your what?" he exclaimed.

"My wife! Word of four letters, Nat, signifying the girl you love and marry! Remember when I went for a walk this morning? Well, that was when it happened—at the registrar's office."

Nat Gurney's features assumed an expression of furious interest.

"I've a good mind to knock your block off! Sneaking away and getting uptied up all secretly like that. Why, it might have taken your mind off the fight!"

"That's where you're wrong, Nat. It gave me something worth fighting for."

"What's the matter with two hundred quid? Now you'll have to share it out with a female. Jimmy, you've got me roused sideways."

His face relaxed in a grin, and the next moment he was gripping Jimmy's hand.

"Here's wishing you luck, Jimmy, anyway. All the best to both of you! Sully Manders, ain't it? I thought so! But why the hell didn't you tell the Press? It's a big story. Here, I must get on the phone."

As he turned towards the door Jimmy, dizzily trying his tie, called after him.

"Collar a taxi for me, Nat," he exclaimed.

Before Nat had finished conveying to Fleet Street by telephone the human angle of that night's big fight, Jimmy was being carried swiftly towards Bletchford Road. He was well within the time he had given Sully, he noticed. Perhaps she wouldn't have finished cooking their supper yet. It would be fun to help her.

How marvellous it would be to be all alone with the girl he loved, in the old house where he had lived so long with his mother!

He thought even for a moment to his mother. She wouldn't have any doubt now that he had selected the profession best suited to him. A purse of two hundred pounds this time; next time, when the Boxing Board of Control matched him with the runner-up for the heavyweight championship, it might be a thousand.

His mother had given a brick to him—helping him, believing in him—scratching the small anxiety she had been left to the very limits to support him through the dark days. He would have to make it up

to her for all her self-denial and sacrifice. Sully would want him to do that. She should never have to struggle and pinch again.

There was Bletchford Road, its two parallel rows of houses, all exactly alike, stretching away into the distance. In his eagerness he had the door open and the money ready for his fare in his hand before the taxi stopped.

But it didn't stop at No. 27, for the good and sufficient reason that another car was already parked there. Jimmy swung himself out on the pavement, thrust the fare, plus a good tip, into the driver's hand, and made his way towards the gate. A momentary frown twisted his forehead as he glanced at the waiting car.

Some Press man, he reflected. This was Nat's doing. One of the papers had sent somebody out to interview him—probably to take a picture of Sully and himself. "Famous boxer's romance!" Hang it all, they might have left him alone that night.

He strode towards the front door. Now for the first time he noticed that there was no light in the house. The front door stood open.

It was true that the kitchen, where Sully would be busy, was at the back, but the light ought to have been switched on in the sitting-room, where they were to have supper. He stepped into the passage. Instantly a curious cold smell assailed his nostrils. It was distinctly familiar, bringing back some remembrance of his childhood. Yes, of course—when he had his tonsils out in the hospital. That smell! He had been horribly sick afterwards. Chloroform!

He stood quite still, conscious of a curious chill of apprehension. Why on earth was there a smell of chloroform in the house? Had anything happened to Sully? At that terrifying thought he felt his heart begin to beat furiously.

Slowly his hand went up to the electric switch and passed there. Abruptly there came to him the feeling that there was somebody else in the entrance hall. He stood quite still, listening. The feeling that somebody was there, lurking in the darkness, was stronger now.

He pulled himself together with an effort. One movement of his fingers and the familiar passage kept out of the darkness.

Steady as his nerves were—hadn't he been in hard training for six weeks?—it was hard to keep back the little cry of surprise that rose to his lips. There, standing on the stairs, only a few feet away from him, was a tall, well-dressed man in well-crowned, striped trousers, a perfectly tailored morning coat, and a top hat. From beneath that top hat a big nose, face, devoid of any expression whatsoever, looked back at him.

One other thing Jimmy Britton noticed before he recovered from his astonishment. The man was holding the lower part of a neatly rolled umbrella in his left hand, while his right gripped the banister.

"Who the devil are you, and what are you doing here?"

Jimmy Britton slid slowly and lightly up the passage, his feet clattering automatically.

"Though I should have formulated my inquiry in less menacing language, that is the very question I was about to address to you."

Jimmy Britton halted. The cool, rolling cadence of the stranger's language had something of the effect on him of a punch on the point.

"Well, that's pretty cool!" he gasped. "This happens to be my home. What are you doing here, and where's my wife?"

"Mrs. Joan Britton?"

The stranger asked the question as if he were conducting a cross-examination in a law court.

"No, Mrs. Joan Britton is my mother, Mrs. James Britton is my wife. My mother, if you want to know, is away at the seaside with friends. I don't know what the devil it's got to do with you!"

"I am relieved to hear that. I haven't the pleasure of knowing your mother, Mr. Britton, but I came here to do her a service. I found the front door open, and being unable to get any reply to my knocking or my ringing, I stepped inside."

Jimmy began to lose his temper.

"You can't call that one on me!" he exclaimed. "There's something funny about this business. Where's my wife? She was in the house and must have heard you ringing."

"I've been all over the house, and I must ask you to accept my assurance that there was no one on the premises."

"But my wife came back here half an hour ago—less than half an hour ago—she was going to cook our supper."

"There are no traces of any ordinary operations in the kitchen, though the fact that the front door was open suggests that your wife came back here."

"Then why isn't she here now?" Jimmy asked, and then added in a voice of exasperation: "What's this all about?"

He gave a violent start as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"There was a smell of chloroform in the passage when I came in."

The stranger nodded.

"Your wife, if asked if she were Mrs. Britton, would reply that she was Mrs. Britton, I assume? The reason why I came here was, as I have already stated, due to my anxiety about your mother. I had a good and sufficient reason for believing that an attempt had been made on her life."

Jimmy gaped at him in horror.

"An attempt on my mother's life! But why? I suppose you aren't mad?"

"Not that I am aware of," the other retorted coolly. "My statement may seem incredible, but it is none the less a fact. Your mother's life was in jeopardy. Of that I am positive. The person, or persons, concerned came here to find her. They found a lady in the house who acknowledged that she was Mrs. Britton. The person or persons concerned, who can never have been Mrs. Britton before, assumed that she was Mrs. Joan Britton, and acted accordingly."

The stranger's even, unemotional tone was maddening. Jimmy Britton's fingers closed on his arm.

"How can you talk like that?" he gasped. "She is my wife. She may have been killed, and you stand there as if it didn't matter! Who are you?"

"My name is Freed—though that has no bearing on the matter we are discussing. As for my being indifferent to the fate of your wife, your surname is perfectly incorrect, my dear sir. I even propose to find her for you."

"Find her? Good God! I'm going to the police at once. Where do you think they've taken her?"

"From the evidence at my disposal I conclude that she was chloroformed and then carried away in a car. Where she was taken, I unfortunately cannot state. To go to the police at this juncture, however, would mean delay when every moment is of importance. These men, if they are to be caught, must be caught at once."

He checked himself abruptly, as if feeling the agony on the roving man's face.

"Mr. Britton, I quite appreciate your

feelings. If you went to the police, at least two hours would be required for a statement. There is the further possibility that if the aid of the police were invoked at this juncture, the men concerned in the outrage would become aware of the fact and run to ground. The search for them would be prolonged and complicated, and might not be successful. Fortunately I have good reason to believe that I know where to begin this inquiry. If you wish to accompany me, we'd better not delay one moment longer."

Perfectly calmly he stalked from the house, and Jimmy Britton found himself, dazed with terror and apprehension, following meekly at his heels. A moment later they were seated side by side in the car that had been parked in front of the house, and for the next three-quarters of an hour the boxer, with the future of whose career the knoxya machines of every newspaper in Fleet Street were busy at that moment, was hard put to it not to believe that he was at Brooklands, instead of driving along the highway into the heart of the English country.

For a while, in his misery and anxiety, Jimmy's thoughts were divided between Sally's possible fate and a not-unreasonable conviction that the car would crash. Presumably, however, as Mr. Freed sat there very erect, with nothing on his face to suggest that the terrific speed at which they were travelling meant anything at all, and so the car, without checking speed, negotiated every twist and turn successfully. Jimmy at last found his voice.

"You say that they wanted to get my mother and that they took Sally by mistake. Why should anyone want to kill my mother?"

"Her money," said Mr. Freed shortly. "But neither hasn't got any money except a small straggle."

"The expectation of wealth."

"But she hasn't got the expectation of any wealth. The whole thing isn't sane."

"Life is a lottery, young man," Mr. Freed replied sternly, "and we've all had to draw prizes without having the expectation of doing so. Your mother must have been a case in point. Somebody knew that this money was coming to her, and waiting the money for those who they decided to remove her."

"But how do you know all this?"

"May I point out to you that your wife has disappeared, Mr. Britton. That chloroform had been used in your house, we are both aware. I know that your mother's life was threatened and that these persons took your wife in the belief that she was the Mrs. Britton they wanted."

"But why should you think such an outrage could have been committed?" Jimmy Britton gasped.

The reply uttered in that odd, wooden voice knocked him sideways.

"Because I happen to know that one murder has been committed to-night, and I have good grounds for suspecting the commission of two, if not three, others."

As he spoke, Mr. Freed cut out his engine and the car glided to a standstill alongside a park wall.

"This is where our inquiry begins, Mr. Britton. You'll have the goodness to follow me."

With this brief preface Mr. Freed clambered to the top of the car, put a leg over the summit of the twelve-foot wall, and disappeared on the other side. When Jimmy Britton joined him it was to find him standing, a vague, hazy shadow in his top hat, by a tree-trunk.

At Redlands Manor this sinister business

had commenced. If his deductions, Mr. Freed reflected, were correct, the timetable was clear cut.

He himself had been rung up at eight o'clock, with the request to proceed to Sir John Richardson's house immediately. He had replied that it would be impossible for him to be there until ten. Fearful that he might not live till then, Sir John Richardson had dictated that simple form of will to Smart, the detective. Somebody had overheard the dictation of the will, and had acted accordingly.

Between eight o'clock and ten o'clock, when he himself had arrived, Sir John Richardson had received a shock which had extinguished the flickering spark of life, and the ransome had been kidnaped. It was now half-past twelve.

Between eight o'clock and half-past twelve, Smart, one of the witnesses of the will, had been brutally murdered in his home in Penton, and Mrs. James Britton, obviously in the belief that she was Mrs. Joan Britton, had been forcibly abducted.

It was physically impossible that this could have been the work of one man. A number must have been employed. Moreover, this gang of conspirators must have

been working somewhere in the neighbourhood of Redlands Manor. Otherwise how could they have known about the will, and how could they have acted so promptly?

To Redlands Manor, therefore, he had returned, convinced that there he would find a solution of the mystery. Where to begin to look, he hadn't the faintest idea, but somewhere in that neighbourhood those responsible must have been collected, and have subsequently set off to carry out their murderous plot. If he failed to find any traces of them, he would return to the house, where, after all, the plot must have been hatched.

Motioning to Jimmy Britton to follow him, he began to wind his way among the trees. Presently he came out on a track, which turning to the right, he followed. In a few minutes he found himself in a small clearing, in the middle of which stood a wooden building—obviously a keeper's lodge.

Mr. Freed advanced towards the door, gripped the handle, and after a moment's hesitation, pushed the door open. All was darkness within. Switching on the light of an electric torch, he lit his boots



As the girl switched on the light the man sprang at her, clapping a chloroform pad over her mouth. He was slick, but he had slain the wrong victim.

play about the interior. It illuminated a deal table round which three chairs were posed. A bottle of whisky and three glasses rested on the table, and by the side of each of the three chairs were the fragments of a cigarette.

Mr. Freed absented these facts without any change of countenance before turning to his companion.

"Mr. Britton, I shall have to ask you a task. Will you be so good as to keep observation on this lot? I would ask you to note carefully anyone who may come here. If subsequently any one of them should leave, you will follow them—if it is necessary, making use of my car."

He led the way out of the bar, carefully closing the door behind him. And, using his torch, selected a bench tree on the edge of the little clearing.

"If you stand behind here, Mr. Britton, you will be unobserved. I will endeavour to join you later. If, however, it should be necessary for you to leave before my return, perhaps you will be good enough to write down the result of your observations and place them here?"

He indicated a small hollow at the foot of the tree.

"You have pencil and paper?" he inquired.

Indeed Jimmy Britton nodded his head. In spite of his fierce anxiety about Sally, Mr. Freed's calm, judicial tone exerted an almost hypnotic influence over him. Before he could ask any of the questions that clamoured in his brain, Mr. Freed had turned and vanished up the track.

Undecided in his hand, Mr. Freed stalked through the woods, across the short stretch of parkland, and so gained the garden and the sweep of drive in front of Redlands Manor. The light was still on in the library, and the french windows were open as he had left them.

"Stepping into the room he noiselessly closed the window, and removing his top hat, sank into a chair. There he waited with monumental patience, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticked out the minutes.

Only once did he move. It was then just one o'clock. Faintly in the stillness of the house there reached him the murmur of voices, and the muffled click of the front door being opened. He rose, and, striding to the window, took up his place behind one of the curtains.

The figure of a man was visible crossing the drive. He watched that figure slip across the garden, to be lost presently in the shadows of the night.

Footsteps crossed the hall outside. Quickly Mr. Freed resumed his seat in the chair. The butler appeared.

"Mr. Hartland asked me to say, sir, that he is extremely sorry you should have been kept so long. He has been so upset by the manner's death that he forgot you were waiting."

"Quite," said Mr. Freed. "Does he wish to see me?"

"He asked me to make his apologies, sir, and say that he would communicate with you to-morrow."

Mr. Freed rose, gathering up his top hat and neatly rolled umbrella.

"Thank you," he said courteously. "Will you please give my compliments to Mr. Hartland and inform him that I shall always be at his service at any time? Before I go I should like to pay my best respects to the deceased."

Disregarding the butler's astonishment, Mr. Freed pushed past him and ascended the stairs with something of the staidness of a professional man. The door of the room in which Sir John Hartland had died was locked. He turned the key,

opened the door, and stepping across the threshold, closed it behind him.

The big four-poster became visible as he switched on the light. Sir John Hartland lay there, covered by a sheet. Mr. Freed advanced towards the bed and stood by its side as if lost in meditation.

But he was not thinking of the corpse with the four-ruined face. Something else was occupying his next attention. If his deductions were correct, somebody else besides Smart, the inquiry agent, and Miss Vane, the nurse, had heard the terms of that will on Sir John had dictated it. But how?

As he reflected on this problem his roving eyes wandered to the electric bulb that hung suspended from the unbrothered lampshade over the bed. He reached up a hand and lifted the shade. As he did so a cunningly concealed microphone became visible.

A few minutes later he rejoined the butler in the hall.

"Good-night," he said quietly.

THE SHADOWER.

ALEXANDER HARTLAND came out of the death chamber, closing and locking the door behind him. All that remained of Sir John Hartland had been laid out with dignity and decorum waiting for his last message to the grave.

Alexander Hartland, fully dressed, now made his way down the grand staircase. From somewhere in the hall Williams, the butler, materialized.

"Is everything all right, sir?" he inquired.

"Everything, I think. I've just going out. I feel I've got to have some fresh air."

Williams glanced at him with a curious, furtive look.

"I thought I ought to mention, sir, that Mr. Freed is still here. He is in the library."

"Confound the old fool! I'd forgotten all about him. Thanks for reminding me. Just give me time to get out of the house, and then go and tell him that I'm much obliged for all the trouble he has been put to, and that there is nothing he can do at the moment. You'd better add that I will communicate with him, of course."

"Very good, sir."

Opening the front door, Alexander Hartland stepped out into the night. It was then one in the morning he saw by the illuminated dial of his watch, Mr. Freed must have been hanging about for close on three hours. Tough luck on the old bird. He had forgotten all about him!

Quietly he made his way across the drive, through the garden into the park, and so to the woods beyond. In spite of the darkness he trod the winding path like one familiar with all its twists and turnings. The keeper's hut loomed up before him. As he saw it he was reminded forcibly of his previous visit some five hours earlier.

Then he had been in despair. Everything had come untrick. Now he was triumphant. His uncle was dead, and the fact that he had searched the room from top to bottom without finding any will had satisfied him that his colleagues had done their work well and thoroughly.

He was no longer a penniless young man living on his wits—what he had once heard described as "somebody with a sallow-bar taste and a 'top-room pocket.'" He was a millionaire! From now onward he would have money to burn in luxury and riot. The blood rushed to his head at the very thought. No one knew—no one would ever know. His plan which had come to him in a flash had been

masterly—Napoleonic. And it had been carried out without a hitch. At least, he hoped so. "So confirm that hope was the reason why he was making his way through the woods."

The door of the hut was closed. He pushed it open and stepped across the threshold. The room beyond was in darkness. Shining a match, he lit the lamp. There was a half-filled bottle of whisky on the table. Filling himself a peg, he dropped into a chair. While he waited he gave himself up to his reflections.

They were of a very rosy kind, and they grew the rosier the more whisky he drank. He had just decided how to deal with the one snag the future presented—the problem of Stanning and Slim—when the handle of the door rattled. He sat up with a jerk. The next moment the two men of whom he had been thinking hurried into the room.

"Say, Stanning, look what the cat's brought in and left behind her! His Excellency, the Sims himself!"

The very riskiness of the American's tone brought Hartland back to earth. This was the sort of thing of which he had had to endure his in the past; he was going to have his share of it now.

"Supposing you stop trying to exercise your rather childish humor and let me have a report?" he exclaimed grandly.

Slim, as he poured himself a drink, groined good-naturedly. Stanning, however, thumped.

"You march up in the cloak, aren't you, Alex? It's the thought of being a millionaire, I expect. But supposing you stop being all outrage?"

Hartland's high spirits suffered a relapse.

"Naturally I want to know how everything went. That's why I came down here in the hope that you'd be back."

"I thought the arrangement was that you were to stick close to the house and play the part of the broken-hearted, bereaved nephew? It was on that understanding that we did all the dirty work."

"There was no reason for me to stick up there," Hartland retorted. "I went to bed, as we agreed. Freed, the solicitor, called at ten o'clock, found the old boy dead and sent me word. I played my part all right. The doctor came afterwards and signed the death certificate. The only question anyone raised was what had happened to the nurse."

Stanning gave an airy laugh.

"Slim attended to her after the old man had passed out."

Slim concentrated his attention on the contents of his tumbler.

"I carried her down through the woods, home—E! say she was no light weight—plunked her in the car, and bent it to that 'hub-bub' of ours."

"And the others?" Hartland inquired.

"I sorted Smart's troubles for him," Stanning retorted. "Then I went and collected the lady from Wiggins. I took her down to Slim to deal with, and we came straight back here in case anything had come untrick. Sure nobody's got an idea?"

"Freed was worried about the nurse, and the doctor was talking about ringing up the racing-bro to make a complaint. It was lucky I thought of packing her things. That's given everyone the impression that she ran out on the job."

"Everything looks hanky-danky, Alex," Slim broke in. "Just how long do you think it'll be before the big share-out? I'm kind of wanting to get back to Miss New York."

"As soon as letters of administration

can be located. I shall leave all that to the doctor. What did you do with the will?"

His question took both of them aback. "We didn't find it," Stanning exclaimed. "We looked everywhere within the time we had, but it wasn't lying around, so far as we could see. I wasn't worried, because I thought you'd have plenty of time to look for it."

Harland set down his glass with a trembling hand and got to his feet. All the incident assurance had gone from his face now, leaving it very bleak and grey.

"You fool! You knew it was arranged that you were to get the will and destroy it."

"Sure," Slim objected, "but we hadn't got the time. I had my hands full with the nurse."

"I kept looking about the room as long as I dared," Stanning interrupted. "I was there for a good half-hour. I couldn't pull the bed to pieces without making everything look suspicious. I made certain you would find it. If it comes to that, why didn't you find it? You must have had plenty of time."

Harland began to walk agitatedly up and down the room.

"I did everything I could think of. I practically stripped the bed. When I couldn't find it anywhere I made sure you'd get it. And now—"

"Well, what are you getting all worked up about, Alex? We got the dress that was down for the whole packet, and she won't be able to collect."

Harland glared at him impatiently. "It might be proved that she did after my uncle did—as she did, of course. In that case, her heirs would inherit, and I shouldn't get a bean."

"I suppose you're certain, Alex, that he made this will?" Stanning inquired.

"Absolutely certain. I heard him dictate it to that fellow Smart. Afterwards he sent Smart for the nurse, so that the two of them could witness his signature."

"You didn't stay listening-in after the nurse was fetched?"

"No, I had it down here to tell you what was going on."

"Perhaps he never signed the will—perhaps he thought better of it," Stanning suggested.

"It had done that it must have been lying around somewhere."

Stanning drummed with his fingers on the table.

"Let's get this quite clear. Smart goes for the nurse to witness the old man's signature. Do you know what happened then?"

"According to Williams, he went back with her to my uncle's room. Smart remained there about five minutes and then left the house. The nurse remained in the room for the night. You know what happened afterwards. At ten Fred came, found my uncle dead, and immediately sent for me."

"One thing's pretty certain. If the will wasn't on the old man or anywhere around the room—and of that we're pretty certain, as we both made a search—he must have handed it to Smart or the nurse, or Fred found it."

"What would he give it to Smart for?"

Harland objected in reply to Stanning's diagnosis of the situation. "He was just a private detective. He might have given it to the nurse to take care of for him. Fred couldn't have found it, as we didn't. Anyway, he'd have mentioned it to me if he had."

The three men stared at one another.

"The conclusion seems to be that the

nurse has got it," Stanning exclaimed. "Slim knows where he put her. He'd better get back and track her. It'll go along with you if you like."

Slim got hurriedly to his feet.

"No, you may right here, Stanning. It'll get along right now and attend to this. If only you'd given me the tip. I'd have looked for her before I came away."

He grabbed his hat from the table and made towards the door.

"If you find it, you'd better phone Slim," Harland called after him. "Phone me, anyway."

"Sure!" Slim called over his shoulder as he closed the door.

Outside among the trees it was very dark—all the darker after the glare of the lamplight he had just left. He walked a few yards to the mouth of a little track that led to the right. There he paused a moment to let his eyes get used to the darkness before he proceeded. From somewhere close at hand came a faint rattling. Instantly Slim's body stiffened, and his right hand slipped to the holster under his shoulder.

For the space of thirty seconds he stood motionless. No sound reached his ears. Presently his body relaxed and his right hand fell to his side. Muttering something to himself, he began to grope his way down the track.

The trees about him began to thin as the path he was following thrust out from the wood among a tangle of bushes to a gate in the high wall. He had almost reached the gate when behind him a twig snapped.

Again he halted and looked back. There was nothing to be seen—nothing to be heard. After hesitating a moment he turned in his tracks and made his way back to the road. But still there was something to be seen.

"I sure got the silver!" he muttered.

Turning once more, he walked briskly to the gate, opened it with a key and slipped out into the road. Close to the gate, parked in the shelter of the wall, was a car. He slipped into the seat at the wheel and pressed the self-starter. As the engine sprang to life its rhythmic purr drowned the faint scraping sound that came from the top of the wall some forty yards away. It faded, too, the thud of feet landing on the grass below the wall.

As Slim turned his car into the road a tall figure moved back along the park wall. There was Mr. Fred's car. Opening the door, he scrambled inside.

As he steered the car into the roadway, the red rear light of the American's car shone like a hotel star far away in the night.

MR. FRED ARRIVES

"WHAT are you going to do about that American tough, Alex?"

There had been a long silence in the hat after Slim's departure. Now, as Stanning raised himself another drink, he asked the question, looking sideways at his companion.

"What an earth do you mean by that?" Harland retorted with a start.

"Going to be a bit awkward, isn't he? I know he says he's going back to New York, but how long is he going to stay there? When he's got rid of that partner you're going to hand him—and that type never keeps anything—he'll be looking for more. And it seems to me that when he tries to catch you you'll have no alternative but to pay up."

Harland scowled darkly at the table. Stanning's words dived curiously with the tenor of his own thoughts. There was the snag which the future held for him.

He had been a fool ever to bring these two men into the business. True, as it turned out they had been useful, but now that he was a rich man—assuming that will was found and destroyed—he would be entirely at their mercy. They wouldn't be content with the share that had been agreed upon. Once that was spent they'd want more. He could see himself, a victim of blackmail, paying out and paying out until all his uncle's vast fortune was dissipated.

"He's not likely to play any game of that kind," he retorted. "After all, I've got too much on him. If he tried any of those blackmailing tricks I could see him wind about the same and Mrs. Brian."

He regarded Stanning for a moment with a vicious smile. What meaning lay behind that smile the other realized only too well. Harland was impressing upon him the fact that he, too, had committed crimes for which he could be sent to the gallows.

"I shouldn't build on that, Alex. If I were you, Slim's a queer customer. He'd double-cross anybody. If he was out of the way for good and all it'd be much better."

And if the speaker were out of the way as well, it would be much better still. Harland reflected. If only he could devise some safe way of ridding himself of both these loons, so that he could enjoy his uncle's fortune in peace.

It came to him in a flash. Why shouldn't he set Slim and Stanning by the ears? He'd only to report to Slim what Stanning had just said, and he knew what the American's reaction would be. Slim would never rest until he got him, so both could be killed at the same time, so much the better. If that proved impossible, it might be arranged that the survivor was sent to the gallows, and then he would know real security.

"Do you think he really would try and assassinate me, Stanning? If I thought that I'd settle his hash right away."

Stanning laughed.

"You bet he would! He's no more to be trusted than a mad dog! I'd bet he's thinking at this moment of how he'll have the squares on you for the rest of your life."

As if violently agitated by this thought, Harland got to his feet. Fostering that poison of suspicion had entered his soul, he began to walk quickly backwards and forwards across the floor, his feet working considerably.

"If he finds that will, how do I know he'll destroy it? He may hang on to it and hand it over me! What a fool I was to let him go back and search that woman!"

Stanning watched him furtively over the edge of his glass.

"That's what I thought, but, of course, I couldn't say anything while he was here."

"I ought to have gone myself. I should never have trusted him."

He made a pretence of glancing at his watch. In his dark mind a cold, calculating purpose had formed. He wanted to see Slim alone to tell him what Stanning had said. What better excuse than that?

"I tell you what, Stanning, it isn't too late. Your car's outside in the road, isn't it?"

The other nodded.

"It won't take me more than forty minutes to get there and back. If I hurry I may even catch him up."

He made towards the door.

"Get a gun, Alex!" Stanning called

after him. "I'll lead you mine if you haven't."

Harland contented himself with tapping his hip-pocket, and opening the door rushed into the night. Left alone, Stanning, with an odd, narcotic smile, set quickly smoking and drinking.

Also would give him "the heat," and then there would be nobody but himself left to share Sir John Harland's fortune. That share would be a handsome sum. He'd have nothing to worry about for the rest of his life. If anything went wrong with him, he knew where he could always get plenty more. Harland would not dare to refuse to be his heir. Already he started in his chair. Upon the silliness of the night, there reached his ears the sound of footsteps approaching the hut. Somebody was coming. It couldn't be Harland, and it couldn't be Slim.

He reached up a hand to the hanging lamp and dozed the light. Then he got to his feet and noticeably crept to the door, fumbling in his hip-pocket as he did so. Stanning there with his ear pressed against the wooden wall, he could hear more distinctly the slow, measured advance of those footsteps.

Now they were outside. The door handle rattled. The door was opening. The beam of a torch flashed in the gloom. From his place behind the door Stanning saw a tall man in a top hat, and a morning coat. Hanging by its crook from his left wrist was an umbrella. In his right hand was the torch and a sheet of ruled paper that looked as if it had been torn from a notebook.

So much Stanning saw before he kept. The muzzle of his revolver, that was fixed with a silencer, made contact with the man's head back.

"Don't move!" he said, kicking the door shut with his foot.

Mr. Freed became motionless. He stood very erect, apparently indifferent to the weapon which might rob him of his life at any instant.

"Get over there and sit down. No! wait a moment while I finish you first."

He snatched the torch from the other's hand, taking possession of the sheet of paper at the same time. A brisk, business-like search of Mr. Freed's clothing satisfied him that he was packing no weapons.

"Here's a box of matches—light that lamp!"

Mr. Freed did as he was told, and then, shepherded by Stanning's gun, lowered himself into the chair at the head of the table.

"Just who are you?" Stanning inquired.

"My name is Freed, of Mutton & Freed, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields. I drove down here at Sir John Harland's request, and remained in the house, anticipating that Mr. Harland, Sir John's nephew, might wish to see me. Hearing shortly after one that such was not his wish, I left the house, intending to return to town. I could not find my car, and not wishing to disturb anyone in the house at such a late hour, I decided to walk to the nearest village. I took a short cut through the woods, and coming across this hut, hoped I might find somebody here who could direct me."

He spoke fluently and without any hesitation.

"I imagine you must have some good reason for this display of violence, my good sir, but now that you have heard my explanation you will perhaps be so kind as to give me the information I was in search of."

Stanning never doubted for a moment the truth of that statement. It coincided

exactly with what he had heard from Alexander Harland. This was undoubtedly Mr. Freed, the late Sir John's solicitor. His credentials were beyond dispute.

It was awkward, for many reasons, that he should have turned in there of all places. The very last thing Stanning wanted was for anyone to see him in the neighborhood, but as that had happened, the only thing to be done was to make the best of the situation.

"We've Sir John Harland's solicitor, are you? Of course, that makes a difference, sir. We've got orders to be very careful. There are a lot of poachers get around these woods if we aren't on the alert. Sorry if I scared you, but *only* is duty."

"And which is the way to the nearest village?"

Mr. Freed had got to his feet, as if regarding his forcible detention at an odd. He held the lower part of his umbrella in his left hand, while his right toyed with the handle.

Stanning, too, rose, and picking up the torch, handed it to Mr. Freed. As he did so his eye lighted on the piece of paper of which he had possessed himself at the same time as the torch. Now he noticed for the first time that there were some words scrawled on it in pencil. Instinctively he began to read what was written there.

"A tall, youngish man arrived twenty minutes after you left. Went into the hut. Quarter of an hour later two other men appeared from the opposite direction. One about five feet eleven, wearing dark lounge suit, the other shorter, wearing a blue suit."

A strange, brain ailment fell upon the hat as he read. Mr. Freed was regarding him fixedly, watching particularly the hand that was lightening his hold on the butt of the revolver that was half resting on the table.

Stanning, with a dreadful sense of panic growing in his brain, was reading the best words of that message—words obviously written in the darkness, in great haste.

"Last man just come out. Following."

With a convulsive gesture he raised his eyes to the solicitor's blank, impassive face.

"You dirty spit!" he gasped.

He raised the revolver from the table, his little eyes growing cruel and menacing. Mr. Freed stood not six feet away from him. To kill him would be an easy matter. But that there was a lot he'd get to know.

Their actions that night, which they had believed unobserved, had been watched and noted out. Their hide-out in that boggy's hut had been known. Their arrival there had been noted, and the appearance of all three noted.

Two men must have been employed—this man, who pretended that he was the late Sir John Harland's solicitor, and the other, who had written that note and was now leading Slim.

He'd get to know what was behind all this. Set above all, he must discover how much this man knew. He would make him talk first, and then kill him. Afterwards—well, his future conduct would be guided, not by any consideration for his two confederates, but by what he learned.

"Now then, you—" he began.

The words died away in a scream. Across the intervening space something

passed like a flash of light—something that glittered in the glare of the lamp. A point of fine steel pierced his wrist, compelling him to drop the revolver on the table. Surely he saw that the man's neatly rolled umbrella had disappeared and that in his hand was the naked blade of a sword.

"Your name?" Mr. Freed demanded.

As he spoke he leaned forward and pulled the piece of paper towards him, the point of his sword lingering curiously above Stanning's throat.

"Bradshaw," Stanning stammered.

"That will serve," Mr. Freed replied. "Will you have the goodness to tell me what you are doing here? That you are a lawyer is, of course, absurd."

Stanning's brain worked swiftly.

"All right! You win! I was driven from town. My car conked out near here and I hadn't any money. I climbed over the wall and found this place."

As an inscription on the spar of the moment, it sounded convincing, he reflected. That, however, it hadn't convinced Mr. Freed, he learnt a moment later.

"Such fictitious peritage is a waste of time. There have already been two other persons here besides yourself. There are three glasses and the ends of three different types of cigarettes lying on the floor. You'd better think again."

Stanning desperately thought of a way out of this impasse. A last wild hope welled up in his heart. Without moving his position—it would be dangerous to do so, with the point of that steel delicately touching his flesh—he moved his right hand to the gun. Though it caused him excruciating pain, he managed to grip the butt of the revolver.

To shoot the other, he knew, was out of the question. Before he could swing the barrel of the revolver round his throat would have been pinched. But the hanging lamp stood between them. He couldn't very well miss that. And in the darkness he might escape.

But somehow he must first divert this impressive stranger's attention. A fraction of a second would be enough.

"If you want to know all about it, why don't you read the message that was left for you, Mr. Oliver Spitt?"

As he had hoped, Mr. Freed's eyes left his face for a moment and wandered to that scabbled sheet lying on the table. He acted instantly. Moving his body sideways so as to free himself from the attention of the crowd, he fired at the lamp. By a miracle the bullet struck the base of the glass chimney and extinguished the light. Darkness fell upon the room.

Slipping down, he set his head and shoulders under the table, and lifting it bodily, hurried it in the direction of Mr. Freed. Then he bolted to the door. With fumbling, frantic fingers he found the handle. He had got the door open—he was outside in the night, running for his life.

Mr. Freed, who had been driven back against the wall of the hut by the impact of the overcharged table, took a few seconds to disengage himself. Before he could reach the door he heard it being opened and the rush of footsteps on the turf beyond. Gropping his way to the doorway, he stood listening a moment. He could hear the crackling of twigs and the thud of receding footsteps. The fugitive had turned to the right. Without waiting another moment, Mr. Freed set off in pursuit.

He had nothing to guide him except those sounds and his knowledge of the

little track by which he had first approached the hut. Along the direction of that track the man was making. Keeping in the path, Mr. Freed raced with a long, loping stride among the trees.

Before him rose up a mass of shadow which he knew to be the wall. He had a vision of the man he was pursuing frantically struggling with the latch of a gate led in to the wall. To reach him before it opened was out of the question. He turned off the track, therefore, and strove for the wall which was only a few yards on his left. Reaching up his hand, he managed to get a grip on the top.

The next moment he had dropped on to the grassy slope by the side of the road. From quite close at hand he heard the sound of a car door being opened and banged shut. And then upon the night-silence there broke the whirr of a self-starter, followed presently by the rhythmic purr of an engine.

He sprang towards the spot which was just beyond the gateway by which the

It might be possible by clambering on to the running-board of the car to stop that mad race through the night. But would such a course be wise? This man who used a gun fitted with a silencer was certainly one of the gang whom he intended to bring to justice. But there were two others.

He considered gravely how he would have acted in such circumstances, assuming that he had been one of the conspirators. Wouldn't his first step be to warn the others, so that they could decide together on some plan of escape, or prepare in collusion some story that they could tell the police?

That, Mr. Freed decided, was how he would have acted if he had been a criminal. Assuming, therefore, that the man was hurrying to join his confederates, wouldn't it be better to remain where he was, allow himself to be taken to wherever the man was going, and so discover everything that he wanted to know?

familiar. One glance at the number plate told him what he wanted to know.

It was his car. Jimmy Britton had got there before him.

THE SQUEALER.

JIMMY BRITTON had succeeded in trailing the car without any difficulty. He had not been driving for more than five minutes before he realized that he could have passed the other vehicle with the greatest of ease. Providence, however suggested that he should keep well in the rear, as far as possible out of range of the other's reflector.

He hadn't the slightest idea what lay behind this adventure into which he had been plunged—except that his wife had been taken by force from their home, and that somehow these men, on whom he had been told to keep watch, were concerned in the outrage. As he swept forward through the night he seemed to be passing through some fantastic nightmare. Now all his thoughts were centred



Jimmy Britton gaped in amazement at the stranger on the stairs. "Who the devil are you," he cried, "and where's my wife?"

man had made his exit. He had a vision of a two-wheeler, with a carrier on the back, to which a valve was fastened, turning into the road. Clipping the carrier, he performed the difficult gymnastic feat of getting both knees on the top of the valves, and then turning himself so that he was seated perilously on the top of the valve.

The car was accelerating swiftly. Now there were clear of the trees and had come out into an open stretch of downland. A moon had risen. Mr. Freed released his left hand and spread out a crumpled piece of paper on his knee. It was the note written by Jimmy Britton that he had not yet read.

It told him that his surmise had been correct. There had been three men in the hut. One had come from the house; the other two from the opposite direction. Those latter had joined the first man who had arrived a quarter of an hour earlier. Britton, following the instructions he had received, had gone in pursuit of the smallest of the three men, who had left the hut by himself.

Mr. Freed reflected on the situation.

Confirmed on the wisdom of this course, Mr. Freed settled himself as comfortably as circumstances permitted. Through the night, over hill and down dale, the car bore. Now it had swung into the mouth of a lane with high hedges on either side. For a while the lane sloped steeply upwards, and then descended into a little dell. The engine slowed down. Mr. Freed could hear the brakes being applied, still holding his crumpled note. He twisted himself round, got his feet to the ground and, managing to retain his equilibrium, stood upright before the car stopped.

Ahead he could see the lonely outline of a cottage. Parked oddly around the square in front of that cottage were three other cars. In the moonlight, one of these seemed familiar.

The man who had called himself Bradshaw was running towards the door of the cottage. Now he had reached it and was beating on the panel with his clenched hand.

Mr. Freed crept forward in the shadow of the hedge. Furtively he opened up the rear of that car which had seemed so

upon Sally, the wife he had only married that day, and he was stirred by an almost frenzied desire for revenge. Now he was thinking of Mr. Freed and his instructions.

"What did it all mean?" He seemed to have been caught up suddenly into an entirely new life. Hardly three hours ago he had been in the ring, watching his opponent being carried out. That whole episode, upon which his future career had depended, seemed as unreal as a dream. Now all that mattered was to find Sally. Such an impression had Mr. Freed made upon him, that, to achieve that purpose, the only possible thing seemed to be to carry out the soldier's orders promptly and unquestioningly.

The car ahead had obviously reached its destination—a cottage standing in a lovely dell, approached by a long, narrow lane. From the summit of a hill, Jimmy Britton caught his first glimpse of the house and saw the car he had been pursuing draw up at the front door. Waiting a few moments until the man he had been following had disappeared through the doorway, he stopped his engine and free-wheeled down the hill.

Without bothering to lock the front door, Slim groped his way in the darkness to the back of the cottage. The key grated in a lock. Not until he was descending a flight of stone steps did he flash on the light of a torch. It illuminated a key-encrusted wall at the foot of the stairs. Reaching this, the American swung to the left. Facing him was another door. He drew back some rusty bolts and stepped across the threshold. The beam of the torch moving across the floor picked up the figures of two women.

They were lying there on the bare stone, head toward and feet. One of them was wearing nurse's uniform. Slim stopped by her side. In the glare of the torch the eyes of the woman looked back at him in frantic terror. Kneeling down, Slim removed the gag from her mouth.

"Shower, I'm sure sorry to have to do this to you. Maybe you don't guess it, but you're lucky. If it had been one of the other two gags who had been left to handle you, you'd sure have had the lead by now."

A little word of terror came from the nurse's lips.

"Take it easy, sister! I never could handle a darter tough. Maybe it's a soft streak in me, but there it is. There was a real dame that named me once when I was all shot up, and I ain't forgetting what she did for me."

He patted the woman's shoulder reassuringly, though his action hardly seemed to have the effect he intended. As far as her bonds permitted, the nurse shrank away from him.

"I told you, didn't I? All you've got to do is to keep your mouth shut, and I'll let you out of this as soon as it's safe. Mind you, I know I'm taking a big risk—but you wouldn't want to send me to the chair, would you? Me, that's not bumping you off when I've got the chance."

"If only you'd let me go," the nurse stammered.

"If everything goes as I reckon it will, that's what's going to happen, sister! You and the other dame are supposed to be safe. I was to give you both the works. But I ain't done it, and I ain't going to do it. But you've got to answer up—where's that will the old guy gave you?"

The nurse looked at him perplexedly.

"The will?" she questioned faintly.

"That bit of paper he signed and you put your name to, along with a guy called Smoot. Come on, sister, tell me where it is, and make me snappy!"

"But I haven't got it. He never gave it to me. Why should he have given it to me?"

Slim sat back on his heels, his face picked out an expression of exasperation.

"You certainly don't make it easy for me, sister. I'm a friend, and you act as if I had it in for you. Come on, now, cut out all the baloney and come clean. Where's that will?"

"He never gave it me, I tell you, the nurse retorted frantically. "If you don't believe me, you can search me."

A little doubt came into Slim's face for the first time.

"That's what I was going to do, only I thought you'd save time by telling me where it was. Save you haven't got it?"

"I swear I haven't! After Mr. Smoot and I had signed it, Sir John took possession of the document."

"Where did he put it?"

"He hidged it under the bolster."

Slim drew in a deep breath.

"I should just hate to thank you was lying, sister! It wasn't under the bolster

when we looked. The old guy pointed out with the fingers as soon as we came into the room. If it had been under the bolster, he couldn't have had time to hide it where we wouldn't find it. I guess I've got to drink you."

He began a very thorough search of the nurse's clothing.

"You win!" he said presently. "It certainly isn't on you."

"There's no reason why I should tell you a lie," the nurse gasped. "Sir John Hartland's will was no concern of mine. I just did as he told me and witnessed his signature."

"Sure! But it means the hell of a lot to us. There's a big war attaching to it, sister. And if we don't find it we'll likely be wanting that war."

As he spoke he gave a violent start. From somewhere in the house, muffled but distinct, came the sound of a voice calling his name. Grabbing the gag from the stone floor, he thrust it into the nurse's mouth and hurriedly binding the scarf about her nose and lips, got to his feet.

"Slim! Where are you?"

That voice was louder now. As Slim bolted out of the vault and thrust home the rusty bolt of the door he could hear footsteps descending the flight of stone steps. As he swung round the beam of his torch illuminated the figure of Alexander Hartland.

"Say, what are you doing here?" he exclaimed. "I thought we fixed it that you'd got to be all right at the old man's kind and keep on being the broken-hearted nephew!"

He was already ascending the flight of stone steps as he spoke. Hartland waited for him, his face in the glare of the torch oddly set and strained.

"In searching here?" he demanded.

Slim stared back at him in bewilderment.

"There ain't nobody here except me. What do you want to ask fool questions like that for?"

"But there were two cars outside here when I drove up—a big saloon car besides yours."

Slim's consternation showed itself in his face. Hartland glared at him.

"You blithering fool! Somebody must have trailed you. The front door was open. He's probably in the house now."

Slim's hand went swiftly to the holster under his left shoulder. Every trace of hesitancy that his face had displayed during his former interview with the nurse was wiped away in an instant. His little blue eyes glowed menacingly. Without uttering a word, he slid past Hartland, switching off the light of his torch as he did so.

Nonchalantly he reached the doorway at the head of the stairs. Edging along the wall, he glided silently like a shadow down the passage. Twice he peered, listening.

On his left was a doorway. Putting his left hand round the jamb, he made the discovery that the door was ajar. It had been closed when he had left the house. He crept down, every nerve and muscle of his starchy figure tensed and alert.

Something was moving in the room beyond. A board creaked. Then upon his ears broke the faint creaking of the door's hinges. He could hear the sound of stifled breathing quite close to him. A lump of shadow formed in the darkness, moved forward, and he felt the massive make contact with something.

"Hold everything!" he exclaimed. "Get an eyeful, and I'll blow the brains out of you."



Stomping jabbed a gun against Jimmy

to ha

With his left hand he switched on the light of his torch. He been illuminated the tall, athletic figure of a young man who was standing on the threshold of the room, half turned towards him.

"O.K., Alex," he called. "I've got this gag."

Hurrying footsteps came down the passage and Hartland looked up out of the shadows.

"What's this bird that's been snooping around? Know him?"

Hartland peered in front of the prisoner. His eyes studied him intently.

"Never seen him before. Just what are you doing here?"

Jimmy Britton made no answer. Half crouched as he was with anger at the way in which he had been pushed into this trap, he found it difficult to utter a word.

"Don't worry, Alex," Slim remarked calmly. "I know how to make these dumb guys speak. Here, you, start moving."

He shepherded his prisoner across the threshold into the room beyond. In the light of the torch a table and a few chairs—all the furniture the room contained—sprang into view.

"You'll find some rope in that corner, Alex. Fix him up, and then we'll make him talk."

Every instinct he possessed made Jimmy Britton long to resent the indignation to which he was subjected during the next few minutes, but prudence told him that it was no good arguing with the man holding that gun. Presently he found himself with his arms lashed behind the back of a chair and his ankles bound tightly to the legs. Only then did the little man slip the gag he held back into his holder.

"Now we're going to have that little talk, buddy," he remarked, seating himself on the edge of the table facing his prisoner. "As a start—what's your name?"

In spite of his desperate situation, Jimmy Britton was determined to say nothing. Obviously, any admission of his identity might upset all Mr. Freed's plans. Silence at whatever price was the only attitude to adopt.

"You're sure got something coming to



back. "Now, then, who are you?" he demanded. The cracks seemed

demanded. The cracks seemed

you if you don't talk," Slim exclaimed menacingly.

Harland struck the helpless prisoner across the face with his hand.

"Start talking," he exclaimed roughly.

Jimmy Briton set his teeth grimly. With an oath Harland took a cigarette-lighter from his pocket and snapped the petrol into flame. Then, stooping down he lit the same for the prisoner's fingers.

"You'd better answer or I'll be the worse for you."

The pain was excruciating. To get a moment's respite Jimmy Briton hurled himself backwards. He had the satisfaction of feeling his head make contact with Harland's stomach, the softness of which helped to break the violence of his fall.

The man roared on the table was laughing. Harland, who had been knocked off his feet and driven back with great violence against the wall, was picking himself up, nursing the wile.

"I ain't ever seen anything as good as that, Alex, on the pictures! It was sure funny!"

"I'll make him talk," Harland exclaimed furiously. "Where's my lighter?"

But something had gone wrong with the lighter as the result of the fall. All his efforts to ignite the petrol vapour failed. Slim, after watching for some moments, slipped off the table.

"You don't want to rush these jobs, Alex. Some guys won't talk, whatever you do to them—not at first! Leave him where he is for a while, and he'll think better of it. We'll have him talking plenty presently."

Harland gave their prisoner a savage kick and then turned to Slim.

"Did you find it?" he demanded.

Slim shook his head.

"It ain't there, Alex."

Harland's face went a sickly yellow.

"See you saw?"

"Would I make a mistake over a thing like that, with so much hanging to it?"

"But if he didn't give it to the nurse, where is it?"

"When they'd all signed it, the old guy

slipped it under the bolster. I guess it must be there still."

Harland stared at him.

"How the blazes did you know that?"

Slim coloured slightly.

"When I said I knew, I was talking out of my turn, Alex. What I meant was I've got a hunch."

"But I looked under the bolster. I practically stripped the bed, I tell you. It wasn't there, I'll swear."

"You want to look again, Alex. I'm willing to lay you'll find it there."

"But how can you know? The nurse didn't tell you, did she?"

"No, do you think I can work miracles? When did you ever hear of a stiff who started talking?"

Slim's tone was angry.

"You sounded so positive."

"Well, ain't it natural? You're lying to bed, same as that old guy your uncle. You can't move. You've nearly busted yourself getting a will drawn up and signed. What would you do with it after? Drop it on the floor? Of course you wouldn't. You'd shove it under the bolster. You go back there, Alex, and have a look again."

"I certainly looked under the bolster. But it may have slipped down between the mattress and the back of the bed."

Harland's tone was more confident now.

"Well, I can't go back until we've made that man talk."

"You leave him to me, Alex. This ain't your end of the racket. You ought to be back at that well joint of yours doing the broken-hearted sighs. What brought you down here, anyway?"

Harland was suddenly reminded of the real object of his visit.

"There's something I wanted to tell you, Slim," he said, dropping his voice to a confidential tone. "Something isn't on the level. I thought you ought to know."

An ugly look came into Slim's face.

"What's he been doing? Spreading?"

Harland shook his head.

"He thinks there's too many of us going to share out on this deal. If you didn't get your end, there'd be more for

him. He put it to me that it'd be a good scheme if we could get rid of you. He had it all planned out. I was to come down here and give you the works."

He saw the instant effect of his words. Slim's face went purple with passion.

"I pretended to agree, and slipped down here to give you the tip. When he finds I haven't done the job he'll do it himself, Slim. You've got to watch out."

"The dirty yellow rat! Why, I've stood by that guy, lent him money when he was stranded in New York, helped him—and now—"

Passion stifled him for a moment.

"He brings me all the dirty work to do—those two dames—and then he turns on me! I'll have him for that! There'll be one less to share out with, but it won't be me! I'm going right back now to give him the heat."

He passed abruptly. From outside came the sound of a car approaching the house.

From his uncomfortable position on the floor Jimmy Briton saw the two men standing motionless, staring at one another.

The sound of the car grew louder. A gleamy light flitted for a moment across the window. Then from outside came a rush of footstep, followed by a banging on the panel of the front door.

"Storming!" Slim whispered, and there was a curious glowing quality in his voice.

The next moment the two men had bolted from the room, leaving Jimmy Briton alone.

CONFERRED!

WITH difficulty Jimmy Briton was trying to master the sense of confusion that had taken possession of his brain. He had been plumped neck and crop into the very heart of a dark, sinister mystery which he was quite unable to comprehend.

There was somebody called Slim, somebody called Alex, and a third man, whom he had not yet seen, named Stenning. Involved somehow in the mystery was a will which had been lost and which those three men were anxious to find. As a result of that will there was to be a big share-out.

These details he had been able to grasp from the conversation to which he had listened. He knew, further, that a serious breach had occurred between the three conspirators. Alex had told Slim that Stenning had proposed his removal so that there would be fewer persons left for the final share-out. What Slim's intentions towards Stenning were, the former had left to doubt.

But Sully? After all, she was the only person that mattered. Slim had spoken of "two dames" when Stenning had left him to deal with. One of them must be Sully, who, according to Mr. Freed, had been kidnapped in mistake for his mother—though why that monstrous thing should have happened, he was still completely at a loss to understand. She might be in that house now.

Was she alive? A frenzy of despair swept over him as he pieced together the conversation to which he had listened. Two dames had been brought there. Slim had complained that Stenning had left there with him, saddling him with what he had called the dirty work.

Did that mean murder? An ominous fragment of that talk floated back into his mind. Slim had protested that he couldn't perform miracles and make a stiff talk.

Sully and his wife might be lying dead in that house—the life torn from their lovely body by these brutes! As that

despairing thought came apertinent in his mind, he struggled violently.

To his surprise, he felt the ropes that bound his wrists give. With an effort he managed to turn himself and the chair to which he was bound sideways.

From outside in the passage came the murmur of voices. The front door banged and there was a grating of a belt being shot back into its socket. Then a voice he had not heard before spoke.

"The dick!" it gasped. "They're after me!"

"How do you know?"

The man called Alex was speaking, his voice little more than a whisper.

"It was just after your game. I heard somebody coming down the back towards the hat. I doosed the light and waited for him. He came into the hat—a tall man wearing a top hat. I jabbed my gun into his back and asked him what his business was."

The voice became breathless for a moment.

"He said he was Mr. Freed, your uncle's solicitor. He told some cock and bull story about having waited a long time up at the house to receive your instructions—how then, hearing you didn't want to see him, he had left only to find that his car had gone. He said he was taking a short cut through the woods to the nearest village, as he didn't like to disturb anybody in the house at such a time."

"But it must have been Freed! Was he wearing a morning coat? And had he got a big, clean-shaven, very thick-looking hair?"

There was an unmistakable note of relief in Alex's voice.

"Yes, that was the man! So he was really your uncle's solicitor?"

"Of course he was! What the devil were you so scared about? He's as harmless as an old cat."

"Harrumph! Was there to me. When he came into the hat he had a torch and a piece of paper in his left hand. I took both from him and then began to question him. When he said he was Mr. Freed, of Manson & French, and swore that you've just told me, I felt everything was hunky-dory. I started to apologise, pretending I was one of the keepers. I had to explain that gun and the way I treated him somehow. Then I looked at that bit of paper I'd taken from him. Do you know what it was?"

But Jimmy Britton wasn't interested in the recital of the note that he himself had scribbled on that sheet of paper. He concentrated his attention on the ropes that bound his wrists. With intense relief he felt one wrist slip free. As he disengaged his arms and turned his attention to the bonds that bound his ankles, more talk reached his ears from outside.

"He held me up, I tell you, before I could see my gun... Look at my wrist."

"Then it couldn't have been Freed! That settles it. It must have been a detective."

Alex's voice, high-pitched and agitated, came to Jimmy Britton as he freed one wrist.

"But how the devil did he know what Freed had been doing at the house? All that stuff about waiting there to see me... It was true. But how the devil did this fellow know?"

"It may look to me as if somebody had the lay-down on our racket right from the start!" Slim's drawing voice broke in. "Somebody's been double-crossing us; somebody's been in with the dicks all the time, and playing Alex and me for a couple of suckers."

Jimmy Britton was free at last. Scratching to his feet, he drew his tall figure erect. He'd got to be careful this time. There would be no more blundering into traps. He was determined to get those men, but he remembered that he'd only got his face while they had guns.

He crept noiselessly to the door, which had been left ajar. Peering cautiously through the gap, he caught a glimpse of the scene beyond.

Slim was holding the torch, whose beams splashed the stone steps of the passage with a circle of light. Occupied about that circle were the three men. The party that he had seen arrive the last were all collected there now.

"What the hell do you mean by that, Slim? You don't think I tried to tell you so you?"

That was Stanning. His right hand had slipped to the side pocket of his coat.

Alex stepped hastily forward between the two men.

"Cut all that out, you two! This is no time for quarrelling. Anyway, if Stanning had been in with the police, he wouldn't have hesitated himself with the risk of a charge of murder."

"He says he give that keyhole guy, Smart, the heat, but how do we know it's the truth?"

"Don't believe me, if you don't want to," Stanning interjected wrathfully.

"You know, at any rate, that I brought Mrs. Britton here. As Harland has pointed out, I wouldn't have done a job like that if I had been working with the police."

Jimmy Britton had to take a grip on himself. There was the brutal kidnapping. The complete lounge-lizard he looked! Every nerve and muscle of his big body ached to express on the other's face how he felt towards him.

But he'd had his lesson. He remembered those guns. He must be careful not to take a false step... If only he could know if Sally were alive! Miserably, so it seemed to him, Mr. Freed had misled him at that particular spot to which Sally had been taken by force from Wingates. Now he must learn her fate.

"Stop quarrelling, for the love of Mike!" Harland exclaimed. "If the police have got into this, we're all in the soup."

"But how in the hell could they have got wise? I haven't talked! Stanning there says he hasn't talked, and it's certain sure you wouldn't open your trap, Alex. It can't have been a dick. Maybe it was this attorney gap, after all."

Slim's tone sounded far from convincing.

"You're forgetting the other man who was waiting outside the hat," Stanning objected. "Why was he there waiting each of us as we entered, and leaving that note behind?"

Slim gave a violent start.

"Say, Alex, I've got it! The guy in there must be the one that was watching. Didn't he say in the note he left that he was following? He sure did trail me, and looked up here."

Stanning was hearing for the first time of the intruder they had found on the premises. It was some minutes before all that had happened could be explained.

"That's the man all right," Harland exclaimed. "We've got him safe enough, and we'll make him talk. I'll have to leave that to you and Slim. Stanning, I've got to beat it back to the house. Slim didn't tell the wife on the mare, and he says my uncle must have played it under the boiler."

"What makes you think that?" Stanning demanded, turning to Slim.

"Just a hunch I've got. Wouldn't that be the place where an old guy who was lying in bed would put it? Sure he would."

Only Stanning noticed the uneasy look on Slim's face. Perhaps because the American had flustered—perhaps because he was frightened and wanted to "get something on" Slim by way of retaliation— suspicion flared up in his brain.

"You didn't say anything about that when you were in the bedroom?"

"It was too long handling the mare."

"But you weren't too busy afterwards. We discussed the matter at length when we were in the hat. What are you trying to pull on us, Slim?"

"I ain't trying to pull anything. I tell you I just got a hunch."

"You hadn't got the hunch when we were talking about the will in the hat. You come back here to find the will. Afterwards you tell Alex about this hunch."

He took a step forward.

"It was the mare herself who told you."

"You've sure shlobbered a bit—tall, buddy! I ain't one of those spiritualist guys who has contacts with the other world."

"But you didn't kill her, Slim. You lied to us. You kept both those women. They're down there now, and they'll get a halter round each of our necks, as Stanning spoke he pushed Harland aside, drawing his right hand from his pocket. Instantly Slim ducked and flung himself backwards against the door.

There was the roar of an explosion. Jimmy Britton, who had been forced to give ground as the door swung violently open, saw the American reel back with the blood pouring from a wound in his neck. His right hand seemed to be groping blindly under his coat.

Jimmy Britton did some quick thinking. There was a gun in the holster slung under the man's left shoulder. If he succeeded in drawing it he might turn it on him. And he himself could do with it.

He swung his left with perfect accuracy to the man's chin. The punch dropped him like a stone to the floor, forcing only to kick the door shut with his feet, he flung himself on the prostrate man's figure, and dragged his gun from its hiding-place.

Behind him he heard the door open. Through the gap there floated the staid smell of cordite.

The torch must have dropped from Slim's hand and smouldered, for the whole scene was in darkness now, save for the stark glow of the moonlight that filtered through the window. Jimmy Britton got to his knees cautiously. As he did so there was another explosion, and he heard a bullet go whizzing uncomfortably past his ears, to embed itself in the wall at the far end.

But the two men outside evidently had a reserve for Slim's marksmanship, for they hung back, using the half-open door as a screen.

"Don't be a fool, Stanning," Harland exclaimed.

"Think I'm going to be hanged for this Yankee twist?" Stanning retorted wrathfully. "He said he would deal with these two women! We treated him. One of them, anyway, is alive, otherwise he wouldn't have known about the old man plying the will under the boiler."

"Have a bit of sense, Stanning! What are you going to get out of it if you still

skin with lead? If the woman is alive, that's a state of affairs that can be easily remedied."

There was silence for a moment, and then Stenning's voice.

"Him—you'd better come out! We've got you."

There was no answer. Standing pressed against the wall, Jimmy Briton saw the door swing wider open. Now in the faint glow of the moonlight, Stenning's motionless figure stretched on the floor must have become visible, for suddenly, with a little cry of exaltation, Stenning broke into the room.

"He's taken it!" he exclaimed with an ugly laugh. "Serve him right, too!" He touched the automatic figure with his foot.

"Dirt Yankee toughie!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Well, that takes you a lot, Alex! Strike a light, and let's see this amazing detective you've got here."

Jimmy Briton was moving himself for action. Had it been a matter of using his fist, he would never have hesitated for a moment. But a gun was an unfamiliar weapon of offense. Even as he hesitated there was the scraping of a match. As the little yellow flame lit up the room, he saw to his horror that Stenning had turned and that his eyes were looking straight at him.

Instantly a shot rang out, and a shower of plaster close to the left side of his head told him how near he had been to death. He had no hesitation now. Hardly he pressed the trigger. Before he even thought of releasing that pressure the automatic had emptied all its cartridges. With a feeling of despair, he saw that the two men had taken refuge between the window and the table. Not one of those bullets had found a billet.

He was weaponless again. The only thing to be done was to make himself as small a target as possible. As he threw himself on the floor, he heard the table go crashing to the ground. Above that barricade the barrel of a revolver showed itself.

"Stenning, don't shoot, you fool!" Hartland's voice rang out. "We've got to make him talk first. We must know what's behind all this."

The table moved bodily across the floor. Jimmy Briton gave himself up for lost. Now the table was quite close to him. A face showed itself above the edge—a face he looked to bit, if its appearance hadn't been accompanied by that of a gun.

"Don't kill him—yet!" Hartland called warningly.

"There's no need for you to worry, Alex. I know how to handle this job."

Stenning was rising from behind the table as if nothing that Jimmy Briton was helpless. Snapping over that barricade, he moved quickly across the floor.

"Let's have a light, Alex."

He jabbed the muzzle of his revolver against Jimmy Briton's ribs.

"Nowlight, who are you?"

MR. FREED GOES HIS STUFF!

ACROSS Stenning's shoulder Jimmy Briton could see Hartland over at the fireplace, huddled with a candle that stood on the mantelpiece. He gave himself up for lost. He let his eyes wander to the dark, dim-shaven face that was looking into him. It seemed to him the very embodiment of cruelty and vice.

Then even as he stared into those narrowed, glazing eyes, something else flashed across the range of his vision. Stenning was standing directly between him and the window. Something had

come between the watery stream of moonlight and the glass of the window. He had a vision of a top hat, below which he could see a shadowy, mask-like face.

Mr. Freed was there! But what on earth was could a man like Mr. Freed be in such a situation? He had told him that he was a solicitor, and though his conduct that night hardly seemed conformable with his professional position, he certainly wouldn't be able to help now.

But unless as he might be in the realm of action, he was a friar. The moment before Jimmy Briton had been feeling hot, lonely, and in despair. If Sally were dead he didn't want to live. He had even been robbed of the chance of renewing himself on those men for what they had done to his wife. He had become almost resigned to his fate.

But now, at the sight of Mr. Freed, those feelings vanished. After all, the solicitor could go to the police, and Sally would not be unavenged. But he couldn't let those men suspect Mr. Freed's presence outside. He must talk, and keep on talking, to hold their attention.

"James Briton, if you want to know," he retorted in a loud voice.

Hartland had succeeded in lighting the candle now, and he could see Stenning's face more clearly. A perplexed, rather anxious look had crept into his eyes.

"James Briton? . . . Where do you live?"

"27, Maribank Street, Wingate."

"What's this, Stenning? What does he say?"

Hartland had joined Stenning.

"He says he's James Briton. I suppose he must be husband of that girl I brought here."

So that settled it once and for all, Jimmy Briton reflected. Sally was in the house, Mr. Freed's arrangements for discovering what had happened to Sally had worked with a mechanical accuracy that was nothing short of miraculous.

"How did you find this place? Who brought you here?"

Stenning was speaking again, but the question he asked was one that Jimmy Briton had no intention of answering truthfully at any rate. Even at that moment he realized that he had no right to invade Mr. Freed.

"I saw you and followed you," he lied.

Stenning stared at him for a moment incredulously, and then, leaning forward, struck him over the face with his left hand.

"You're lying!" he almost screamed. "You couldn't have seen me. There was nobody about. You were working with somebody else—a man who wears a top hat and a morning coat. He must have given you the tip. . . That's the truth, isn't it?"

Jimmy Briton could hardly believe his eyes. The lower sash of the window was being pushed up. Mr. Freed, instead of retreating before that show of armed force, was actually trying to get into the room.

"I've told you the truth," he shouted, so that his voice might drown the other's movements. "I was at the end of the street. You never noticed me. I couldn't understand what a car was doing outside our house. I hid myself in the shadows to have a look. I knew it couldn't be my neighbor, because she's down at the seaside, and anyway, she couldn't afford a car."

He hardly knew what he was saying. He was talking simply to make a noise—to hold the attention of those two men. The window was wide open now. Mr.

Freed, still holding his neatly rolled umbrella, was actually searching over the sill, his movements as furtive and as noiseless as those of a cat-burglar.

"I saw you come out of the house, carrying my wife. I ran as hard as I could to catch you, but you drove off too quickly. Luckily, I managed to grab a car and as was able to follow you here."

"Are you trying to tell me that you are my bringer your wife here?"

Jimmy Briton realized the difficulty in which he had involved himself, but there was no going back now.

"That's right."

Stenning's mouth was twisted in a vicious snarl.

"The car you came in is out there now, and it wasn't there when I left. Besides, you were in the woods at Redhills Manor. You were watching the hat. The note you left described how you saw me and when I arrived. If you'd come here first, you couldn't have done that. You're lying—and I'm going to have the truth out of you."

His face was convulsed with fury.

"You say that Joan Briton is your wife. I don't believe it. You belong to the police. You're going to tell us how much they know."

Mr. Freed was in the room now. He was standing there, a tall, monumental figure, gripping the lower part of his neatly rolled umbrella with his left hand. His pose suggested contemplation, philosophical detachment, like almost childlike, curiosity—everything, in fact, except action!

"I never said Joan Briton was my wife. I don't know what you're talking about. Joan Briton's my mother. If you were after her, you've got the wrong Mrs. Briton."

From Hartland came a strangled cry.

"You chummy, blundering fool. Stenning! You brought the wrong woman! Now what the hell are we going to do?"

Stenning's face was ghastly in the candlelight.

"I'll show you what I'm going to do. This man shan't have any chance of talking, and we'll collect the rest Mr. Briton yet."

He raised his gun. But Jimmy Briton was completely indifferent to the nearness of death. Something else was occupying his attention in the confusion of everything else.

Mr. Freed had made a movement with his left hand. The lower part of his neatly rolled umbrella had come away. Now he was holding a long-bladed sword, whose shining steel glittered in the candlelight. He was moving forward with the careless tread of a trained athlete.

Even as Stenning raised his right hand the blade of the sword leapt forward like a tongue of flame. With deadly accuracy the point of steel made contact with the blood-stained handcuff that was tied about Stenning's right wrist.

The scream of pain that came from Stenning's lips was drowned by the roar of an explosion. The bullet from the defunct revolver found its billet in the paneling of the door. Jimmy Briton saw the chance for which he had been waiting. Almost as quickly as Mr. Freed's sword had swung his left came up to Stenning's jaw. It was a patch, perfectly fitted and perfectly placed. It was, indeed, an exact replica of the one which that night had placed him in the running for the heavyweight championship of Britain.

He saw that dark, convulsed face grow black as Stenning fell back heavily on

the ground, to lie there with his arms spread out in complete unconsciousness.

"Don't move, Mr. Hartland! Obdience by taking your hand out of your pocket."

Mr. Freed's voice broke in on the stillness, in the even, uncomprehending tone in which he might have explained the intricacies of a contrivance to a bewigged judge.

"Thank you! Put your arms above your head. . . Mr. Britton! I perceive there is a cage lying on the floor over there. Might I trouble you to fetch it and hand this man's arms? . . . No, don't move, Mr. Hartland. I should be sorry to have to use my weapon, even in an act of justifiable homicide."

Never had Jimmy Britton performed an action which gave him so much satisfaction as the handling and training of Alexander Hartland.

"You still have some rope left, Mr. Britton. Descending as your perch was, it is probable that that man will soon come round, and I do not wish to be detained further by any unnecessary trouble."

When Jimmy Britton had finished according to Stanning, who was recovering slowly from his "dose of brain-joy," Mr. Freed pointed to the other figure lying on the floor.

"Is that the man you followed, Mr. Britton? He looks to me in a bad way."

"Stanning shot him. They had a row, as far as I could understand, because Slim—that's what they called him—hadn't killed the man he brought here. . . And by wife, Mr. Freed?"

"He's coming round. Ask him, Mr. Britton. Perhaps he will tell you now."

Jimmy Britton dropped on his knees by Slim's side. The man's right hand was moving feebly towards the holster under his left armpit. As his fingers failed to make contact with the familiar bolt of his weapon, his eyes opened. In them was an expression of bewilderment. Presently they seemed to focus the features of the man bending over him.

"Say, buddy, how do you manage to be around? He gasped in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

"My wife?" Jimmy Britton exclaimed frantically. "Where is she? Has anything happened to her?"

Slim's mouth twisted in a wry smile.

"Well, you've got me where you wanted me. To think that I should get the works from a yellow-bellied orange hawked like that twister Stanning! I sure made me feel bad! I've got to hand it to you. I ain't no use trying to kid anybody any more. I've always got a soft spot for a frail. I never could handle them. But the toughest guy you like in front of me, and if the business has got to be done, I'd let him have it. But a damn. . ."

He gave a little cough, and a thin trickle of blood flowed from the corner of his lips.

"Did I ever tell you, buddy, about the nurse in the hospital in New York that looked after me when I was all shot up? Say, she was a beauty! Kind of gave me a soft spot for all times."

"My wife?" Jimmy Britton stammered. "She's down there along with the nurse. I was going to let them both go, when you cut in on the kidnap."

"He gave an odd laugh. "I guess it all came unback, and I looked a darn—sorry for nothing. Wags of it! But they won't get me! I'm for the last jump, buddy. . ."

Mr. Freed was kneeling on the other side of him now, holding his wrist.

"He's going," he whispered. "Ask him what happened to Sir John Hartland?"

But Slim seemed to be slipping into the coma of death. It was Mr. Freed who had to ask the question—it was more in the nature of a statement, for which he was awaiting confirmation.

"You broke into Sir John Hartland's bed-room tonight? Your sudden appearance subjected him to such a shock that he lost his treble hold on life?"

"Sure! . . . Me and Stanning! . . . It all worked like a dream. The old guy passed out right away."

"And you kidnapped the nurse, leaving Stanning behind?"

"We had to find the will. We couldn't collect unless we destroyed it. The dance is all right. . . Down there. You'll find them. . . Say, tell them I was real sorry to have to scare them!"

Altogether his face went blank. His limbs moved convulsively—and suddenly he was very still.

Jimmy Britton got to his feet. He stood there for a moment, feeling a little sick. It was the first time he had ever seen death. Then abruptly the thought of Sally came uppermost in his mind.

Without a word he turned from the room, after seeing the candle from the mantelpiece. Leaving Mr. Freed in the dark, he made his way into the entrance passage. He had no difficulty in finding the door opening on the cellar stairs, and presently he was stooping over the figures of the two women.

It was Sally to whom he turned first. Trying the knots of the rope that bound her, he gathered her in his arms.

"Sally! Darling!"

Her eyelids fluttered, and then presently she was looking at him, terror in her eyes.

"It's me—Jimmy! You've nothing to be frightened about now, Sally!"

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Jimmy?" she exclaimed in a dazed voice. "But, Jimmy, I haven't covered your armpit!"

With a rather broken laugh, Jimmy Britton caught her to himself and covered her face with kisses. Only then did he remember Sally's fellow-prisoner. When he had released the nurse she got stiffly to her feet and leant for a moment against the wall, her hands pressed to her head.

"I want to go back to my patient," she exclaimed suddenly.

Jimmy Britton couldn't find it in his heart to tell her that Sir John Hartland no longer required her attention.

"You've both coming along out of this right now," he exclaimed. "Do you think you'll be able to walk, Sally?"

"Yes," said Mr. Freed at the top of the stairs, noticing at once that he was carrying now the neatly rolled umbrella.

"May I express to both you ladies my satisfaction at seeing that you have come safely through such an unpleasant experience?"

Brown though the recollection of Mr. Freed's extraordinary behavior was still fresh in his mind, Jimmy Britton felt faintly irritated at the auditor's attitude. Sally and the nurse had been very near death—and he was talking to them in the tone of a gentleman offering shelter to ladies who had been caught in a thunder-storm!

"I've got to get them out of here," he said a little roughly.

"Quiet!" said Mr. Freed. "You will take them to Redlands Manor, Mr. Britton. You'd better use my car. These are, fortunately, several vehicles available, and I will use one of the others."

"But I've got to get my wife home!" Jimmy Britton protested.

"There are certain matters that have got to be attended to first, Mr. Britton," Mr. Freed replied levelly. "You will follow my instructions, please, and await me at Redlands Manor."

When he talked in that particularly firm tone, there were few people who would have disobeyed Mr. Freed, for he managed to convey by his manner the combined authority of the Court of Appeal, the House of Parliament, and the Crown itself. Jimmy Britton, remembering all he owed to Mr. Freed, certainly was not one to defy his instructions.

Down was beginning to break when he pulled up with a feeling of awe in front of the stately portico of Redlands Manor. The name, who impatiently rang the front door bell, answered after some delay the appearance of the astonished butler.

"How is Sir John?" she exclaimed.

"He's dead. Haven't you heard, miss? He's been dead these six hours."

Jimmy Britton had just time to catch the name before she faded.

THE DOCUMENT.

OUTSIDE the curtain of the dawn was slowly rising. As Jimmy Britton stood at the French windows of the library at Redlands Manor, the view beyond became visible little by little. First the terrace and the drive; then, out of the shadows, the garden and the park beyond, with its background of woods.

The birds were beginning to sing. He turned absently to glance at Sally, who, worn out, was fast asleep on a settee. As he did so there was the sound of a car approaching the house.

Mr. Freed at last! He saw him step out of the car, looking as if he had come straight from a stroll down Piccadilly. His top hat glistened in the morning light; there was not a crease in his well-cut morning coat. There was nothing about him to suggest that he had taken any part in the wild adventures of the night. He looked as neat, dignified, and impossible as his umbrella—which was not solely an umbrella, Jimmy Britton reflected.

He was followed by two men in uniform, one of them obviously a superintendent of police. They disappeared up the steps, and presently Jimmy Britton could hear the ringing of the front door bell. It rang and rang, and nothing happened.

The butler who had opened the door to them must have fallen asleep, Jimmy reflected. Mr. Freed had requested them to remain at Redlands Manor until his arrival, and he had complied with his request, but he wanted to get back to Wimpington as soon as possible. Quietly crossing the library, so as not to wake Sally, he crossed the hall and opened the front door. As the sight of him one of the men in uniform stepped forward, Mr. Freed made a little gesture with his hand.

"This is Mr. James Britton—not Williams, the butler," he explained. "Have you seen Williams, Mr. Britton?"

"Not since he let us in about two hours ago."

"Quiet!" said Mr. Freed. "I think, superintendent, the best thing to be done will be first to inspect the servants' quarters."

They found Williams in the butler's pantry. He was seated at a table, over which his body sagged. One hand clutched a small luncheon glass, while the other took from his stiffened fingers.

"Pressie said!" he said grimly. "He saw the red light and got out."

Mr. Freed made a motion with his hand. "In view of the conditions you have got, his evidence would have been of little service. You would wait now, perhaps, to inspect the bed-room? You will find it at the top of the stairs. The microphone is attached to the shade of the electric light, which hangs over Mr. John Hartland's bed. You will doubtless be able to trace the connection."

"Yes, I think we can carry on now, sir," the superintendent replied. "I shall want a statement, of course, from this gentleman and his wife, and the nurse."

"I cannot speak for the nurse, but Mr. Britton and his wife will be remaining."

Jimmy Britton scattered his resentment at Mr. Freed's cool disposal of his future movements, until the two representatives of the law had turned their backs.

"Look here," he exclaimed wrathfully. "I'm not going to hang around here any longer! I've got to get to my wife home. The poor girl's absolutely worn out with all she's been through."

"You live in your mother's house, I understand?" Mr. Freed inquired, apparently ignoring his protest.

"Yes, I am living there at present. But what's that got to do with it?"

"You propose living with your mother for some time?"

"Well, we haven't been able to spot a house that we like yet, at a rent we can afford."

"Why on earth was Mr. Freed asking all these questions about his strictly personal and private affairs? There were so many things he wanted to learn—what had happened to Hartland and Stanning, what the police had said—and, most important of all, how, and by what road, had Frank Sully and he had been dragged into this business?"

"You said you wanted to get your wife back to your mother's house?"

"Yes, of course I do!" Jimmy replied impatiently.

"Precisely! That's why I told the police that you were remaining here."

Jimmy scowled at him.

"What's the big idea?" he stammered.

"I don't understand a word of what you're saying."

"This is your mother's house?"

Jimmy Britton gaped at him. Obviously this extraordinary man was cracked!

"What?"

"I repeat that this is your mother's house," Mr. Freed retorted impatiently. "She should be here any time now. You will remember that I asked you where your mother was staying. I phoned her there, and she's coming by car."

"But mother can't afford a car!" Jimmy protested, his head in a whirl.

"By an expense she will regard as a mere trifle, Mr. Britton."

"Trifle! Why, it's all of or more than a hundred and fifty miles. They'll stick her seven or eight pounds— Anyway, what's all this stuff you're telling me?"

They were standing in the big entrance hall, facing one another, Jimmy Britton rather red and resentful.

"I had an interesting conversation with your mother on the telephone, Mr. Britton. What she told me completely satisfied the case against Alexander Hartland and Stanning. It appears that when she was a girl she was courted by a Mr. John Hartland. However, she preferred your father, and married him. John Hartland, who became Mr. John Hartland, apparently never forgot his first and only romance. He remained a bachelor. Last night, having discovered the real charac-

ter of his only kith and kin—his nephew, Alexander Hartland—he sent for me to make his will. Fearful that he might be overruled by death before I arrived, he dictated a short form of will which he duly signed and had witnessed. That was the will which Hartland, Stanning, and the American were so anxious to discover."

He seemed to read the bewilderment in Jimmy Britton's face.

"Hartland overheard the terms of the will while it was being dictated. He knew that the nurse and a private inquiry agent called Smart had witnessed the document. In case those witnesses might come forward they were removed. You know what happened to the nurse. Smart was murdered at his home in Pinakio by Stanning."

His voice was devoid of emotion of any kind. He might have been reciting nothing more exciting than the alphabet.

"There remained the beneficiary under the will. That was why your wife was kidnapped. She was Mrs. Britton and she lived at Herbert Road, Wingham. Stanning concluded, therefore, that she was the person he wanted."

He took a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

"This is the will. I was so fortunate as to find it on the dead body of Mr. John Hartland. You will see that he leaves all his real and personal estate to your mother. The property, which includes

this house and all his effects, should amount, after the payment of death duties, to a million sterling at least."

Jimmy stared with widening eyes at the document. There it was in black and white! His mother, who had scraped and saved all her life on narrow means, was now immensely rich! This house would be her home.

"And I thought, when I won the championship, I'd be able to give her everything she wanted!" he gasped in a tone that was almost resentful.

Quite suddenly he turned the will back into Mr. Freed's hand.

"I've got to go and tell Sully, even if I have to make her up."

Mr. Freed made his exit, too. He was once more the white-hot initiator, as he recovered from a relentless crime fighter as anyone could imagine.

In the morning he would arrive at his Lincoln's Inn office, with his folded umbrella in his arm, and work would go on as usual. But, all the time, Mr. Freed would be waiting, hopefully, for the next chance to dive into some reckless adventure, to solve a mystery or to right a wrong.

THE END.

(There will be another number of Mr. Freed's complete case, to contain THE FRESH LIGHT OFFERING. Meanwhile, we believe for full details of next week's out-of-the-ordinary, long complete story, "FUI GOLD.")

Next Week—Mystery in the South Seas!

To My Readers

JIMMIE POWELL liked Baryan Island the moment he saw it—a verdant spot in the South Sea, somewhere in the Fiji Archipelago. But when he landed on the beach and took a look at the one and only hotel he received a shock.

Cockroach Inn it was called, according to the sign outside, and no one lived there except Swabber Wally, down and out. He did not pay for his keep and there was no one to whom he could pay it, anyway, because Luke Bole, the owner of the hotel, had left Baryan Island months before. Business was like that on Baryan Island.

The inn was well-named. Even Swabber Wally slept out on the veranda in a hammock. Inside, the place was overrun with cockroaches, ants and rats—alive with them.

But mystery dwelt there. Several people were very interested in Cockroach Inn. There was Cookman, the trader, and Shoop, the policeman, to say nothing of snogging Chinese from McQuaid's plantation, preventing round for opium.

There should have been a guest there, too, but there wasn't. A man had been murdered in Cockroach Inn, and since then it had gone to rack and ruin.

But one night there was another murder, and strange lights shined in the broken windows. The cockroaches rattled over the creaking floor-boards. If they could have talked what weird things they could have revealed!

There was SOMETHING in the old inn—something that couldn't be found. And whatever it was, it spells death for those who sought it.

And Jimmie Powell was framed for murder because he had beaten up Cookman, the trader, in a quarrel over a girl. Mystery brooded over Baryan Island,

and settled over Cockroach Inn, while the authorities craved out for a conviction and Jimmie Powell languished in the jail in the shadow of the gallows.

But he didn't stay there. He was a fighter, and he had friends he knew nothing about.

It was a hot spot for him and many were the dangers he ran before he wriggled clear and solved the mystery of the Cockroach Inn.

Read about it for yourself in next week's unusual Long Complete Story, "FUI GOLD," by Allan Vaughan Elton.

All the glamour and fascination of the South Seas are in this grand yarn, coupled with breathless incidents and tense situations. Here is a story unlike any you have read before, and you won't miss a word of it.

Make a note of the title—"FUI GOLD"—and make sure of next week's THRILLER Library. Don't lose the opportunity of reading this amazing story of South Seas mystery.

In the same issue of the THRILLER Library you will find another long instalment of "THE GREAT ATLANTIC MYSTERY," by Maxwell Grant, Laurence Cranston, known as THE SHADOW, is spinning his web carefully and closely, and gathering the threads of the crafty conspiracy into his hands. Heroically he is running down his man. You will follow the amazing developments in next week's instalment of this powerful story with breathless interest.

The Editor

Letters to The Editor should be addressed to:
The Thriller—Office, The Shipping Press,
Farringham Street, London, E.C.4.

CAN THE SEA KEEP ITS SECRETS FROM THE SHADOW?

The GREAT ATLANTIC MYSTERY



JUST TO REMIND YOU.

EVERY ship that carried a cargo consigned by Messrs. Hugh Barville & Co. for foreign ports had to call at mid-Island.

LAMONT CRANSTON, known as THE SHADOW, the world's greatest crime fighter, set out to solve the mystery of the lost ships. When a steamer had containing bodies was stopped aboard the sea, Craston was seen aboard, catching and waiting. At that HARRY VINCENT, the Shadow's name who used to be a passenger, discovered that HARRY VINCENT, a passenger, was really EDNA BARVILLE, Barville's daughter, in disguise.

Cranston, too, was aboard, and he got into touch with one of the ship's officers so that the ship's course was altered. The coast got ahead of his presence and decided to dock the ship out in the Channel. But Cranston had played the vessel's course, so that the next day in shallow water near Weymouth. No lives were lost.

Cranston had no far left, but he had a clue that indicated the mystery to be JEROME TRAMER, who was going to be a millionaire aboard a yacht. Cranston managed to get on the yacht to discover that Tramer's secretary, HAYDOCK, was a lawyer, and that against his signature he was keeping was that of Hugh Barville.

(See Read On.)

THE SHADOW'S WAY.

AS the man tilted one sheet into the light, Cranston saw its bold-lettered signature. The name that Haydock had written was that of Jerome Tramble.

With Haydock in his employ, Pointer Trame could go far with his impetuosity of Tramble. It was plain that Haydock was a skilled forger, who could supply the one thing that Trame most required: a satisfactory replica of Tramble's signature. That, however, did not clear the situation; contrarily, it actually perplexed Cranston.

At this rate, Trame could bleed the vast riches that belonged to Jerome Tramble. Why, then, should Pointer Trame be working at other crimes?

Cranston wanted the answer to that

question, and he was soon to get it. Haydock had finished with his copy. He laid the papers on the desk and stepped towards the door. The door was closing imperceptibly as he approached.

Outside, Cranston vanished into a darkened side passage. Swept back by gloom, he was gone like a dissipating puff of black smoke when Haydock slipped from the cabin. The evil-faced secretary was going up on deck to talk with Trame; hence did not bother to lock the cabin door.

Haydock's footings were still echoing from a companion-way when Cranston glided into Trame's cabin.

The documents that Haydock had signed with Tramble's name were comparatively unimportant. They were papers sold to the blackmailers by Tramble's lawyers. They had to be returned with Tramble's signature; but there was no rush about them.

In the top drawer of the desk, however, Cranston found a batch of correspondence that explained the matter that had puzzled him. Most of those letters were a year old, written before Pointer Trame ever had met Jerome Tramble.

From those letters Cranston learned that Tramble had disposed of nearly all his vast estate. He had turned it into gifts and endowments to friends and institutions, with the understanding that the donations should remain anonymous until after his death. He had put the small remainder of his wealth into a trust fund, simply to support himself and cover the upkeep of the yacht *Blarmon*.

In meeting Jerome Tramble, Pointer Trame had not found a master of mass millions. He had simply come across a man who had become the world, and was living on a comparative pittance!

By taking Tramble's place, Trame had acquired possession of the yacht *Blarmon*, and nothing more. Whatever

**A POWERFUL
STORY OF
THE WORLD'S
MOST FAMOUS
CRIME
FIGHTER**

By
**MAXWELL
GRANT**

money came from the managers of the trust fund was immediately swallowed up by current expenses. No wonder Trame had found it necessary to play some other game! He would be glad when he could give up the part of Jerome Tramble entirely.

Digging into another drawer, Cranston found more papers. These were a discovery of a different sort, but quite as valuable as the first. They were letters and other documents, carefully arranged in order of date, all signed with the name of Hugh Barville!

Some of the papers bore the letter-head of Barville & Co. and every document told a story. First, there were letters and receipts pertaining to the shipments of delicate machinery, with references to when and how these shipments should be taken from storage.

Next were letters that covered the transfer of the platinum shipment, brought in from Colombia and held for a few days before it was sent to America. There were letters, too, arranging for an armored truck to carry Barville's strong box to the pier where the freighter *Oriskany* had been moored.

Finally, Cranston read a most important letter, addressed to a concern called the Waterways Transfer Company. The body of the letter read:

"In accordance with my previous instructions, you will dispatch the auxiliary lugger *Whitcomb* to acquire whatever cargo may be reclaimed by the afloat ship

Havre, at present operating on the wreck of the freighter Coast. From said cargo, one item, namely a chained strong box, is mostly important, and must be held in your possession pending my further instructions.

"Sincerely yours,

"Hector Barvale."

Every letter in that batch eyed Hugh Barvale with the brush that he had so completely avoided. Until the present, Cranston had not found one scrap of evidence that could prove Barvale as the silent partner in the murderous activities that had produced several sea disasters, culminating in the loss of the freighter Coast.

Vincinating Barvale as a hidden crook. There was good reason why Pointer Trane should retain these important documents.

Assuming that Barvale and Trane had agreed upon an equal division of insurance money and other spoils, Trane's only sure way to collect his share would be through possession of these letters. Properly brought to light, they would incriminate Barvale without involving Trane.

It looked like the old story of crook mis-trusting crook; but behind it Cranston could see another factor.

But Cranston's wary ears could detect distant sounds, and identify them. He was hearing such tokens as he replaced the Barvale correspondence in its proper drawer. The sounds were those of footsteps outside the cabin. They signified that two men were heading in this direction; probably Trane and Hapfeldt.

His french was right.

He was scarcely outside the cabin when he saw figures descending the wide companion-way. Their faces were not quite in sight at the moment of Cranston's silent retreat into the opposite passage. He saw them from the darkness, Trane and Hapfeldt. As soon as they had gone into the cabin, he made for the companion-way.

Along the darkened rolling decks, he started past the wireless-rooms to check on any incoming messages. None came during the five minutes that Cranston watched. It was time to be getting back to his own cabin, in case the parceler, making his half-hourly round, should decide to peer inside.

Footsteps were already breaking towards him when Cranston edged through his own doorway. In the darkness of the little cabin, he remained stockstill, knowing that the parceler would certainly knock before trying to unlock the door. In that case, Cranston could inquire who was there. That would satisfy the patrolling look-alike.

As it happened, the man didn't stop. His paces continued onward in their methodical fashion. Cranston reached for the doorknob, intending to step out again and use the next half-hour to look in on Trane and Hapfeldt.

Then, like the silent darkness itself, Cranston became motionless. The fading of those passing footsteps had allowed him to hear a clear sound—a noise, less breathing that seemed to move their inches from his elbow.

Cranston was no longer alone in his cabin. Someone had entered during his absence. Whoever the man might be, he had listened, when he entered, that Lascroft Cranston was gone. That fact, once proved, could place Cranston in the worst predicament of his career.

Aline on the Marmora, faced by Trane's picked crew of crooks, he would be up against terrific odds. He would be safe only if he could resume the part of

Cranston without anyone learning that he had temporarily been the Shadow.

There was still a way whereby that could be accomplished.

The way was to expedite the departure of the lurker who had not managed to clear from the cabin before his return. That done, Cranston could take time to decide upon his next plans.

Turning from the doorway, Cranston moved silently inward, to proceed with his momentous task.

SOFT THE SHADOW.

SEEKING that lurker was a matter that required utmost care. The same darkness that aided Lascroft Cranston also rendered his opponent invisible. Moreover, Cranston was running a risk that increased with every moment.

Once the other man suspected what was up, he could take measures of his own. A wild shout would certainly bring members of the crew to Cranston's cabin. That would startle the very Shadow that the Shadow wanted to avoid.

Therefore, Cranston applied special strategy. As he moved about the cabin, first towards the port-hole, then in the direction of the berth, he allowed slight sounds to reveal his approximate position. He made it seem that he hadn't realized the other man's presence.

Moreover, he was craftily coaxing his unknown quarry into a crucial move. He was opening a path towards the door, so that the fellow would try to reach it. The manœuvre was risky; but it couldn't be overdone, otherwise the man would have a chance to slide out. The thing to do was hold him by some different strategy when he reached the door.

In any room, that crafty game of guess-work would have been remarkable. In this cabin it was doubly momentous. In that darkness the participants were like caged creatures confined in a square-walled box that some giant hand was tossing back and forth to cut his changing whims.

For the Marmora, on an idle north-west coast, was neither heading into the sea nor following the lengths of waves. The yacht was carrying sails with pinches, and to keep them footing both Cranston and his sneaking visitor had to stay close to any fixed objects that they could grab.

Cranston had reached the berth at last. He was confident that the other man was near the door. Something was needed to hold him there, and Cranston found the needed. His bag was near the foot of the berth, which was towards the door. He kicked it.

The bag tipped over; the latch box clattered as it fell out to the floor. The sound was fairly close to the door. Cranston sensed that the other man was crouching still, not ready to move until he heard some further noise.

Timing his action to the yacht's roll, Cranston crept away from the berth and came in towards the door from the opposite direction.

A pitch floundered Cranston towards the wall beside the door. His elbow clamped hard, but he disregarded the sudden numbness. Knowing that the man had heard his clatter and would instinctively gain ahead, Cranston lurched forward. He came to an immediate stop with a very low.

One step upon the fellow's throat, Cranston presented an ostery. His muffled hand was clatching at the gun which the fellow showed against him. Managing to push the weapon aside, Cranston put one finger underneath the trigger to prevent its fall.

Cranston's thrilling tactics were pay-

ing dividends. Rolling away from the door, he carried his fist with him. They recoiled against the berth. Flanking the revolver from the loop hand that held it, Cranston flung the man on the mattress.

A tiny flashlight twinkled. It showed a grayish, haggard face looking upward with frightened eyes, while bright lips gulped volubly for air.

The man on the berth was Hartley, the old steward.

Promptly Cranston flung aside his cloak and hat. He turned on a light above the berth. Hartley's expression changed at the sight of him. The steward's air was faded.

"I—I didn't think it was you, sir!" he whispered. "I came in—to talk to you—"

Hartley's pause showed traces of uncertainty. It was Cranston's quiet nod that gave him courage to go on.

"But you were gone," added the steward. "I was afraid that they had captured you. So when you came back I didn't recognize you. I'm sorry, Mr. Cranston."

Seated by the berth, Cranston picked up the tin box that had fallen from the bag. The box also had a double bottom that contained a make-up kit. He replaced it carefully in the bag, the interval allowing Hartley to regain his breath.

"Tell me the whole story," then suggested Cranston calmly. "Everything about Jerome Trebble."

The account wasn't as bad as he had anticipated. Though Trebble was dead he hadn't been murdered. It had all started in Havana, where some of the crew had gone ashore and got into trouble.

They had been jelled, and Trebble, testy because of ill health, had refused to help them. He had followed the advice of a very friendly captain named Mr. Trane, who had obligingly found new work for the Marmora.

By the time the yacht left Havana others of the old crew had jumped ship, leaving only a few of the original personnel, Hartley being one.

"Trane hoped to swindle Mr. Trebble," declared Hartley, "but he never had time for it. Two weeks after we left Havana Mr. Trebble had a heart attack, and died. At least—the steward spoke chocky—he had his last wish. He was buried at sea.

That was done secretly by Trane. Instead of continuing to be a guest he took Mr. Trebble's place. I was the only one of the old crew allowed to see him. My eyes are weak, and I must confess that I was deceived at first. Only—"

"There was something that puzzled you," interposed Cranston. "You declared what had become of Trane."

"Yes, sir," rejoined Hartley. "I talked with the others who had been with Mr. Trebble. We worked it all out, found the truth, but we have kept very quiet since. I always pretend that I think Trane is Mr. Trebble. But we're ready, sir, at the four of us. We've hidden guns that Trane doesn't know about. Let one man start it, we'll fight!"

Cranston's hand clapped encouragement upon Hartley's shoulder. Reaching above the berth, Cranston turned off the light. Hartley understood the reason a few seconds later, when footsteps were past the cabin door.

By that time there was a swish in the darkness. Cranston was putting on his cloak and hat. A tiny flashlight came on, focused towards the floor. It flicked red, changed to green, then went white again.

"Stay here," came Cranston's low voice, "and watch for the light. Move back if you see it red, come out when it turns green. Then go to your quarters and any nothing. Your visit here must not be known."

Drawing Hartley towards the door, Cranston left him there and glided out to the deck. Clutching the rail, he took a look in both directions. Suddenly, from the folds of his cloak, he flashed a red light. Hartley saw it, closed the cabin door.

Cranston had spotted someone coming along the deck. The fellow hadn't seen the guarded glass, but he was brandishing a flashlight of his own. A twist of his hand turned it slightly upwards. Cranston saw the steams pipe and ugly eyes of Hartley.

The finger was glowing, as though he anticipated something pleasant, which, in Hartley's case, would mean evil work. He stopped at Cranston's door and listened. His flashlight, tilted under his arm, gave a view of his displeased count.

Hartley wasn't wearing his spectacles. Like Traine, he used glasses only for show. His eyes were sharp, as keen as his ears, and he was disappointed because his suspicions were not proved. Hartley had suddenly stopped at Hartley's bunk-room. Not taking the coward, he had guessed that he might be with Cranston. Hartley, however, could bear no unions.

He turned to leave the cabin. The yacht gave one of her unexpected pitches. Plans across the deck, grabbing the flashlight as he waddled low, Hartley came into unexpected luck. He hit the rail, rebounded, and found his flashlight glaring directly upon a black-clad shape that was standing with one arm crooked about a deck post.

Tilted almost beneath the Shadow's hat-brim, Hartley's torch reflected the glint of burning eyes, revealed the profile of a hawk-faced countenance that was Cranston's, but which had a different effect when seen above the upturned collar of a blackish cloak. Hartley, a croak by trade, couldn't be mistaken by that sight.

His smart told that he had recognized the Shadow.

As the Marmora attacked head between the waves two forms were precipitated together, partly by the yacht's pitch, partly by their own endeavor. Out from Cranston's cloak whipped a hand that gripped an automatic. Slashing that the aside with his flashlight, Hartley yanked a long knife from a sheath beneath his coat.

Reeling back and forth along the deck the two engaged in a ferocious grapple, perhaps the hardest duel that Cranston had ever fought with a single opponent.

A croak long banished to the tropics, Hartley had learned many native tricks with a knife, the sort of weapon that suited his own anatomy. His handling of the dirk's point prevented Cranston from bringing in the gun muzzle the way the cloaked fighter wanted.

Suddenly Cranston took the upper hand. He had picked the very chance he wanted. A shove of his fat drove Hartley back, prodded by the gun-point. His own hand twisted half at the back of him, the croak couldn't bring up the knife.

A waryward lurch of the Marmora came to Hartley's aid. Cranston was hurled back, striking shoulder-first upon the deck, with Hartley plunging towards him. The finger tried a long stab with his knife, but Cranston rolled in under it.

Hitting head, Hartley scowled against the rail.

As Cranston came to his hands and knees, his fingers touched his own little flashlight. It had dropped from beneath his cloak. A glance at Hartley, who was moving very grudgingly, indicated an opportunity too good to waste.

Cranston flicked the flashlight green, then extinguished it. He turned to subdue any last struggle that Hartley might intend.

Recoiling from the little cabin, Hartley answered the "go" signal that Cranston had given him. In a glance the steward saw the cloaked fighter looming above Hartley. Thinking himself unneeded, Hartley hurried along the deck to the passage that led to his tiny bunk-room. Reaching the passage, he stopped; he couldn't resist a look backward.

Moonlight, straggling through an opening cloudbank, showed Hartley a sight that he had not expected.

Cranston had hauled Hartley to his feet, was starting the fellow toward the cabin. But the croak still had fight left in him.

With a spasm so vicious that it seemed a demon's fury, Hartley flung himself upon his cloaked captor and battered the Shadow against the rail. Clever as a steersman, he snatched away the knife that Cranston had taken from him.

A downward dip of the yacht gave Hartley a less complete view of the startling scene. He saw Hartley's arm swing wide clear over the rail, then inward. The knife slashed Cranston's cloak from shoulder to hip. The yacht bobbed upward; the figure tumbled against the moonlight, the cloak drooping like a top.

Hobles shoved together, Hartley heard the rattled report of a gun, barely audible amid the roaring of the foam.

What he heard did not match what he saw.

Hartley's hand still moved. It stitched his knife deep, close by the rail, where Cranston was trapped. Tossed by the yacht's heel lift, both figures twisted; as the rail went downward they stretched across it.

The steward saw a hand swing inward to toss the knife across the deck. Then, as the Shadow's cloak slipped loosely down the shoulders that wore it, one fighter gave a heave that sent the other plunging into the ocean.

Hartley saw the victor stoop, pick up the knife and wipe it on the deck. Practically the steward ducked for his bunk-room when he heard footsteps come towards the companionway. Crouched inside, he trembled when a hand tapped on his door.

"Who is it?" gasped Hartley.

No words replied. All that Hartley heard was a chuckle, a snarling growl that bespoke a vicious triumph. That tone was Hartley's. His only trace of disappointment seemed due to the fact that Hartley was in his cabin, where he belonged.

Hartley lacked evidence that would connect Hartley with the Shadow.

The footsteps went away. Hartley groaned, regretting that he had not been close enough to add the Shadow in these last moments of combat. Weakly he opened the bunk-room's tiny parthole for a breath of fresh air.

As the Marmora slid upward to a water's high cross Hartley saw a flickering distant light that seemed to bob and vanish. The moon was gone now, but again the steward caught glimpses of that tiny beacon.

Perhaps that glimmer meant the coast! Miles away, but within a strong swimmer's range. The Shadow might reach that shore despite the heavy sea, provided that he was not too badly crippled by Hartley's knife-thrust.

Maybe though the hope, it was all that Hartley could give.

IN LONDON.

It was noon the next day, and Harry Vincent stood gladly beside the window of his hotel room in London. It seemed a day made for gloom.

The weather was dismal, rainy, and it was the thirteenth of the month; but these weren't the factors that bothered Harry. He was thinking of the Shadow, wondering what had happened to his chief.

When last heard from the Shadow, as Lamont Cranston, had made a forced landing in a plane miles out at sea. The newspapers had carried stories of that adventure; had also announced the late news that Cranston was a guest of Jerome Trebble, whose yacht had fortunately been on hand to rescue him. Lamont Cranston, it seemed, was at present very safe indeed.

That was precisely what bothered Harry Vincent.

He knew that there had been a purpose in the Shadow's last excursion from Weymouth. At things he actually came wrong, and he had seen the Marmora by chance, the Shadow was where he didn't want to be.

That seemed to be likely, for the Marmora, of all ships crossing the Channel, was the best place that Harry could imagine as headquarters for Pointer Traine.

However, Harry had long ago learned to accept the unlikely as the plausible. It was possible, he admitted to himself, that the Marmora had been the Shadow's actual objective. That would be poor comfort, for it made matters even more serious.

The crux of the whole thing was that the Shadow's agents were at a standstill.

They had followed certain orders from Hartank, the Shadow's contact man; but those had obviously been prearranged. Both had reported to Hartank, but had received no new instructions. The real fact must be that Hartank had heard nothing more from the Shadow.

Harry Vincent finished his soliloquy with the very correct conclusion that something serious must have happened on the yacht Marmora. He wondered how that would govern matters in the Channel.

There, the newspapers said, strong winds had loosened. With the sea calmer there would be resists from salvage operations on the Hercules, the ship that had anchored beside the sunken Osark.

By that time, Harry was sure, the Shadow would be needed.

The jangle of the telephone brought Harry from the window. It was Hartank, speaking in a methodical tone that he always used. He was giving instructively a string of them, the very sort that Harry needed!

Harry made a list of three names: Bright Supply Co., Eclipse Garage, Martime Cafe.

It was after lunch when Harry arrived at the first place. The Bright Supply Co. dealt chiefly in gas and electric fixtures, with an assortment of other objects that looked like junk.

A baldish, pudgy man named Cusher was summoned when Harry inquired for paint, without specifying the kind he wanted.

THE COBBAIN CREW.

It was fortunate for Harry Vincent that he had lost his recent concern regarding the Shadow's safety. Coincident that his chief was behind recent moves, Harry was relieved for anything. He needed to be.

Harry's guide urged him through the door at the back of the Maritime Club. Coming through himself, the fellow closed it and shoved a bolt. That put them in a tiny room, completely dark. A good place for a knife thrust in the ribs if the rat chose.

The man groped past Harry, found a door in the opposite wall. He knicked at, at the same time clutching Harry's arm and shoving him forward. The door was yanked inward from the other side, bringing a jumble of raucous voices along with a vast cloud of cigarette smoke.

Harry was shoved into the light, to meet the nose-to-nose eyes of a dazed man who occupied the hidden run-down. Conversation stopped abruptly as Harry's conductor stepped in beside him.

In all his encounters with thugs Harry had never met such an ugly-looking mob. Each member of that outfit looked capable of murder; everyone had a hard glare that carried malice along with suspicion. They wore like a pack of wolves; let one start a yelp, the lot would leap upon their prey.

For large they had weapons as assorted as themselves. Harry saw pockets that had the bulge of guns, knife-hilts poking from belts. One tough was slapping a blackjack against his open palm as though testing it, in case he had to use it on Harry's head.

The river rat gave a nod of his thumb towards Harry.

"This bloke," he said, "is Vincent."

"That's me!" greeted Harry to the mob. Then, picking an empty chair by the wall, he sat down as if. Once seated, he took a slow look around the group. Tying his chair back, he let the handle of a .45 shift over from his hip.

The tough in the next chair pulled out a packet of cigarettes and offered Harry a smoke.

It wasn't until his eyes became accustomed to the smoke-hazy atmosphere that Harry saw a face he knew. He had missed the man at first glance, because the fellow was placed inconspicuously in a corner. But when Harry happened to look his way the man thrust a pair of braced shoulders forward and poked a crafty, winked face into sight.

That man was Hawkeye, brother of the Shadow's underworld agent.

Hawkeye, it seemed, wasn't supposed to know Harry, which meant that they must have been recruited separately. The most likely man behind that little job would be Cliff Marsland.

A big-shouldered man, who answered to the name of Pike, was busy checking off the men. Pike had a squinty-eyed manner that might have been caused by the cigarette smoke, but Harry vaguely remembered having seen him somewhere before. Finding that the whole mob was assembled, Pike started the procession out through a rear door.

It was dark along the water front, but the toughs were careful not to cross the street in a crowd. They went singly or in pairs; Harry chose the latter arrangement. It gave him a chance to slink along with Hawkeye.

He asked if Cliff had fixed it.

"Yes," stated Hawkeye in a side-murmured whisper. "We've got Tapper with us, too. Cliff wanted to bring

Clyde Burke along, but couldn't fix it. He's trying to bring in Jericho."

Tapper, Burke and Jericho were three more of the Shadow's many secret agents.

They reached the Maritime Pier, went through a doorway that brought them towards the outer end of the wharf. Other toughs were awaiting them, bringing the total close to twenty.

Alongside the pier was a low-lying craft with two stumpy masts. Lights from the dock shined faces, and Harry saw Cliff Marsland close at hand.

A change came for Cliff to draw Harry aside. Hawkeye called up beside them. Tapper wasn't rear because Cliff had already talked to him.

"I jacked up with the mob this afternoon," underlined Cliff. "I wouldn't have found them if Burdock hadn't told me the name of their ship. It's called the Welcome."

From the looks of the boat, Harry classed it as little better than a mud scow; but his opinion changed when he heard Cliff detail a few of the ship's merits.

The Welcome, he said, had an auxiliary motor to help her limited sail spread. She'd have a slow time of it, chugging down the river; but, once at sea, that motor would begin to purr. Her clamp superstructure was camouflage. Along the water-line, and below, she was shaped for speed.

"We'll reach the Hercules in good time," completed Cliff. "We're supposed to take over the salvage ship before they send the dragnet down."

"Who's in command?" asked Harry.

"The skipper of the Welcome," announced Cliff. "His name's Braden. He's been getting orders by wireless. Probably from Palmer Trust."

"How about Pike?" questioned Harry, remembering the man who had counted the crew back in the rendezvous. "What's he?"

"A lead mouth!" returned Cliff. "He won't count after we're on the boat. That's when Braden takes over."

Hawkeye gave a warning that broke up the group. Pike was swaggering up to talk with Cliff.

"There's a chap here says he knows you," announced Pike to Cliff. "His name's Jericho Drake."

"Bring him in," rejoined Cliff. "We need him. This outfit may have to get before we get back to port, and Jericho knows how to rock."

"Let me see he could fight, too."

"He can!"

Pike went away, to return with Jericho. The new recruit was a giant African, whose shoulders had a width more than proportionate to his height. Cliff noticed him aboard the Welcome, telling him that the galley was at the stern.

Something was detaining the mob. Crooks were anxious to get aboard the Welcome, but Pike hadn't given the word. On the dock Harry saw a squat man with a scarred face beneath the battered peak of an official-looking cap. Harry identified him as the skipper, Braden, and it was plain that the captain was chafing at the delay.

Away from the dock edge, Harry was keeping himself inconspicuous, when he was suddenly conscious of a glow behind him. He swung about, straight into the glare from a pair of headlights. A car had swung on to the pier.

Harry ducked away, as anyone would have, to avoid the car. But he realized

that the move had made him very prominent, particularly to any persons who might have noticed him from the car. When the headlights flicked off another light came on inside the car.

That wasn't all that Harry saw. In the rear seat, between a pair of tough-looking passengers, was a girl. Harry couldn't mistake her.

The girl was Edna Harwick, in her guise of Ruth Kinsey!

Had she seen him?

Harry wasn't sure, but he didn't like the sharp way in which she was peering from the car. One of the men was getting out to join Pike, who had stepped over beside the car. Harry was wondering what to do next, when a quick hand plucked his sleeve.

It was Hawkeye. The little man had recognized Harry's dilemma.

"Slide aboard the ship," whispered Hawkeye. "Tip off Jericho, tell him maybe you've been spotted. Have him keep an eye open. You're low!"

Harry added to the pier edge and dropped aboard the vessel's stern, close to the galley.

Pike held conference with the man from the car, while the vehicle was turning round, to be ready to leave the pier. Edna wasn't coming aboard the Welcome, which was one good factor. Still, Pike hadn't given the order for the mob to move.

Looking around, Pike saw Cliff. He introduced the hunky who had come from the car.

"This is Jericho," said Pike. "Maybe you remember him, Marsland?"

"I remember!" nodded Cliff. "He was aboard the Omark."

"Yes. We've been waiting for him to show up so we could show off. Only, Jericho's just told me something. He says it looks as if we've got a suspicious bloke in the crew!"

Pike was moving the trio towards the inner end of the pier, which faced Cliff, because there was an old office in the wall, only a few yards behind the stern of the moored vessel. As they neared that door Cliff suggested:

"Let's stop in here, as the man, wherever he is, won't know where on to him."

Inside, Pike became direct.

"You ought to know the man," he told Cliff bluntly, "because you signed him off!"

"Did I?" Cliff was cool. "I signed on several others, too!"

"The man I'm talking about is Vincent."

"What makes you think he's not on the level?"

It was Jericho who answered Cliff's question.

"Vincent," he said, "looks a lot like a fellow that was a passenger on the Omark. And his name's the same!"

Cliff, at that moment, would have liked to be in the car that Jericho had just left. He could fancy checking a certain young lady who was alternately blonde and brunette. For Cliff knew that Edna Harwick, or Ruth Kinsey, whichever she chose to be, could well be the person who had recognized Harry from the car.

Maybe Jericho was trying to take the credit for himself, but it didn't matter. The man was a bad one.

Standing by a wide, panesless window in the side wall of the snug office, Cliff looked at the faces of Pike and Jericho. They were tough, the two of them, as dangerous as any pair of cut-throats in the entire underworld mob.

From the faces that peered at him Cliff

lung. "Rayford gave a triumphant chuckle, and the big shot duplicated it.

"Excellent, Rayford!" said Pointer in the silencing tone that he had cultivated. "That compares perfectly with Craven's signature. Was it well, finding those identification cards in his cabin."

Rayford arose from the desk, helped himself to one of Trane's Havana cigars, he rubbed his eyes to ease their strain, then put on the spectacles that rested so importantly from his high-bridged nose.

"It wasn't easy," he said severely. "Look at the fine lines I made. They were hopeless. But now"—he wriggled his fingers to rid their cramp—"I could sign Craven's name with my eyes shut!"

Pointer agreed that Rayford could. "To-morrow," said the big shot, "I want you to leave for Southampton. Stay there a few days, then go up North somewhere. Keep sending letters, all in Craven's name."

"Where to?" asked Rayford. "To me first," replied Pointer. "Before you leave Southampton you will hear from me, giving further details. By that time I shall know much more about Lornet Craven's."

"How about cashing cheques?" "The question brought a chuckle from Pointer.

"Always practical, aren't you, Rayford? You've got cash cheques on Craven's account, but do it carefully. No one means avoid meeting anyone who knows Craven personally. Now remember this."

There was silence while the yacht's engines supplied a low-drummed tone. Then Pointer, seated at the desk, spoke suddenly in a voice that was not Trebble's. His tone was a harsh one, tinged with venom.

"This yacht was a bad spot for the Shadow."

"Not so bad," inserted the secretary blandly. "It was just luck that I spotted

him. If I'd gone over the side instead of him where would you be, eh?"

"Right here!" snapped Pointer. "Even the Shadow wouldn't have had the guts to knock me off with a whole crew to back me up. It had, got rid of you, Rayford. I'd have known it inside of half an hour."

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