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detective  
story  
every week



The Case  
of the

## SHRIVELLED MAN

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SEXTON BLAKE, detective, and WALDO the WONDER-MAN, ex-crook and Peril Expert.  
A story packed with strange incident ; punctuated with surprise and sensation.  
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# The Case of the SHRIVELLED MAN

"Well?" asked the constable. "Never saw anything like it," replied the sergeant. "Seems to be a kind of mummy."

*And so it was—but a new kind of mummy; the mummy of a man just dead. A sinister find, this, for Sexton Blake to explain. But that was only the first problem of many.*



## CHAPTER 1. An Extraordinary Find.

**T**HE body was shrivelled in an incredible, fantastic way; and Police-constable Rudd stared down at it, horrified. The bright beam from his electric lantern revealed every detail of that awful figure.

"Gosh!" said P.-c. Rudd

As he afterwards admitted to his wife, he was "knocked all of a heap." The discovery was so unexpected—so unusual. Five minutes earlier, the constable had been walking placidly along his beat, his thoughts dwelling on nothing more sinister than a couple of sausages he had recently partaken of.

It was just about one o'clock in the morning, and a wild, cold, blustery night. Streatham Common was an exposed spot, and the wind came shooting across from the south side, noisy and boisterous. Overhead, the night sky was half obscured by scudding, ragged clouds.

The mournful howling of a dog had first attracted the constable's attention, and he had been rather surprised to see a miserable-looking terrier standing on the grass, on the other side of the road—just on the edge of the common itself. This terrier was howling in the most distracting fashion, although its notes were not particularly loud.

P.-c. Rudd moved over, and the terrier, after a final doleful cry, shot off into the darkness, palpably terrified.

And at that moment the constable had seen something lying just on the grass at the edge of the common—a huddled, motionless shape. And the sudden flashing on of the officer's electric lamp had revealed—this.

"Never saw anything like it!" declared the police-constable huskily. "Never!"

He looked round him with something of consternation. Apparently he had the whole of Streatham Common to himself. The stray dog had gone—apparently the brute had only come upon this body by accident, and had thereupon proceeded to mourn the dead. Clearly, the dog was not connected with the unfortunate man or he would certainly have remained on the spot, and probably he would have resented the constable's investigation.

Not a living soul was near. Far away, down the common, a belated L.C.C. tram had pulled up outside the Greyhound, and a couple of motor-buses were coming along from the direction of Norbury. But here, where the police-constable stood, all was dark and mysterious.

There were no trees—no fences. Just the bare road and the open common, with the wind shouting and blustering. And there, at P.-c. Rudd's feet, that grotesque, unaccountable Thing.

The constable braced himself and peered more closely.

As he did so, it struck him vaguely that he would not have made this discovery but for that howling dog. For he would have had no occasion to cross the road and thus come within sight of this strange body. It would undoubtedly have lain there until the morning, when its presence would have been obvious to any passer by.



The face of the thing was shrunken, wrinkled, and leathery, as though the flesh had been dried upon the bones.

"Well, I don't know," said P.-c. Rudd. "Better get help, I suppose. Looks like one of them Egyptian mummies, excepting for the clothes."

He pulled his whistle out and blew a shrill, penetrating blast. He was comforted some moments later when a hurriedly-approaching figure resolved itself into the stout form of Sergeant Billing.

"Thought you'd be somewhere near by, sergeant," said P.-c. Rudd. "Come and have a look at this, will you?"

The sergeant looked, adding his own light to the other. And for some moments he remained silent. But he was obviously startled.

"Well?" said Rudd, at length.

"Never saw anything like it!" replied the sergeant. "Seems to be a kind of mummy."

"Just what I thought," nodded the constable. "Not that I've ever seen a mummy dressed in a smart tweed suit like this—and in a macintosh, too!"

"How did it get here?"

"No good asking me," said the constable. "I heard a dog howling, and came across to see what the trouble was, and found—this! Haven't seen a soul about, though, so there's no tellin' how long it's been lying here. What shall we do with it?"

"You'd better hurry off to the station and get an ambulance," said Sergeant Billing, as he went down on one knee and held his light closer. "H'm! Seems

to be embalmed in some sort of way. Must have been dead for years."

"Come out of a crypt, most likely," agreed the constable. "But what was the idea of putting a mummy into a smart suit of clothes like this? New, too."

They continued to look at the strange discovery, rather fascinated by the queer horror of it.

"Some fools playing a practical joke, probably," said the sergeant gruffly. "Anyhow, somebody put the thing here on the common. I don't know, though—there's something funny about this, Rudd," he added suspiciously. "I've seen a few mummies in my time, but I've never seen one like this. It's—well, different."

"That's what I thought," said the other, nodding. "Looks like a mummy, but yet it isn't. All shrivelled up and shrunken and dried. He may have been dead for a hundred years, or he may have been dead for only two or three months. Wonder how they got these clothes on the thing?"

"Perhaps we'd better look through the pockets?" said Sergeant Billing. "Here! Hold this lantern."

He went through the pockets, but they revealed nothing. At least, nothing that could possibly establish the identity of the people who had perpetrated this extraordinary trick. A packet of cigarettes, a box of matches, a pocket-handkerchief—without any trace of a laundry mark—and the return half of a railway ticket. Croydon to London Bridge. The sergeant inspected the date.

"Funny!" he muttered. "Yesterday's date on this ticket. Oh, well, we can't do anything more until we

*This complete story introduces that old favourite WALDO, the Wonder-Man, and of course Sexton Blake and Tin'er.*

get him to the mortuary. They might discover something there. You'd better get off, Rudd, and fetch that ambulance."

**S**EXTON BLAKE, attired in an old dressing-gown, and with a favourite briar between his teeth, reached out a lean hand across the desk for the telephone. Only for a moment did he hesitate; then he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

He felt annoyed. Why should he be bothered at this hour? It was well past midnight, and the Baker Street establishment was quiet for the night. Mrs. Bardell had gone to bed long since, and even Tinker had turned in some half-hour ago. Pedro was allowed the privilege of keeping his master company, and at the present moment the faithful old dog was stretched out on the hearthrug, looking up with one blinking, inquiring eye. Even he seemed to think that it was wrong that a disturbance should come now.

Blake had counted on a clear two hours, without interruption, before going to bed. He had a most intricate cipher to solve, and earnest concentration on the task was necessary. There were times when Blake wished that telephones had never been invented.

"Well?" he repeated, more impatiently than ever. "Hallo! Who is it?"

"I want Mr. Blake—Mr. Sexton Blake!" came a hoarse voice over the wires.

"Blake speaking!" said the famous criminologist.

"You are Mr. Sexton Blake?"

"Yes."

"I want you to come, sir—at once!" said the voice earnestly. "My master has been murdered! I'm Pringle, sir—Sir Lionel's butler! If you can come at once, sir—"

"One moment!" interrupted Blake. "You haven't told me where you want me to come to?"

"Sir Lionel Bland's house, sir—in Streatham."

"Streatham?"

"Yes, sir," came the agitated voice. "I'm Pringle, the butler. Can you please come at once, Mr. Blake? The master's lying here, on the floor, dead—murdered!"

"Have you informed the police?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I don't know—I'm half mad with fright, sir!" came the butler's frantic tones. "Sir Lionel often spoke about you, sir, so I rang you up. I thought—"

"Are you sure that Sir Lionel Bland is really dead?"

"He's on the floor now, sir—right in front of me—murdered! I know he's dead, sir! There must have been a terrible fight. His poor head is shockingly battered. Oh, sir, I'm alone in the house, except for the housekeeper and the maids, and they don't know anything yet—"

"All right!" broke in Blake. "I'll come!"

"May Heaven thank you, sir!"

"I'll be there as quickly as

possible!" said Sexton Blake. "What is the exact address?"

"Stowe Lodge, sir, Streatham Common—North Side, sir."

"Very well," said Blake. "You had better telephone for a doctor at once—and then you must communicate with the police, too."

"Very good, sir," came Pringle's voice. "But a doctor won't be able to do anything."

"All the same, you must procure one," said Blake. "I'll be with you as quickly as possible."

Blake did not wait to hear the butler's expressions of thanks. He hung up, rose to his feet, and strode out of the room. Pedro, probably scenting that something was afoot, got up from the hearthrug, and stood alert and eager.

Sexton Blake went into Tinker's bed-room, and he laid a hand on his young assistant's shoulder, and shook it.

"Hallo, gov'nor!" said Tinker, sitting up wide awake. "What's up?"

"Dress yourself as quickly as possible, and bring the car round!" said Blake briskly. "I want to start from here within seven minutes."

Tinker leapt out of bed.

"Hang it, you're not giving me much time, gov'nor!" he protested, as he commenced to dress with lightning-like rapidity. "Still, I'll do my best. Are we going far?"

"Not far. Streatham Common."

"Hardly worth getting the car out!" grunted Tinker. "Still, you know best, I suppose. Another night's sleep gone west!"

"It all depends, Tinker," said Blake. "The case may not occupy us more than a few hours."

Tinker was well accustomed to dressing at speed, and, sure enough, he had the Grey Panther standing in Baker Street, outside the front door, within the stipulated seven minutes. And as Tinker pulled up, and got out of the driving-seat, Sexton Blake emerged from the door, carrying an attache-case.

"Now, gov'nor, what's the job?" asked Tinker, as they turned into Oxford Street, and bowled eastwards. "I notice you've brought Pedro with us, so I imagine it's an important case?"

"Murder, by the sound of it!" said Blake.

And he gave Tinker a brief account of what had passed between himself and Sir Lionel Bland's butler over the telephone.

"H'm! Sounds pretty bad!" commented Tinker. "But you can never tell, gov'nor. We're probably going to Streatham on a fool's errand."

**A**S the Grey Panther turned out of Streatham High Road, and purred up the North Side of the common, the full roar of the wind came across the open space, and buffeted violently round the swiftly-moving car.

"What's the name of the house, sir?" asked Tinker.

"Stowe Lodge."

"Pity we don't know the number," said Tinker. "It's an awful fag,

trying to find a house just by the name. The trouble is, they don't put the names prominently enough."

"You'd better direct the spotlight on to the gates as we go past," said Blake. "Not that it will really be necessary, for the police will probably be in possession by this time."

The car swung round a bend, and for a moment the headlamps revealed a uniformed figure standing just off the road on the grass of the common.

Blake slowed down at once, pulling up opposite to the police officer.

"Can you tell me which is Stowe Lodge, the residence of Sir Lionel Bland?" he asked.

"Farther up, sir—about a hundred yards," replied Sergeant Billing. And his very tone told Sexton Blake that he knew nothing of Sir Lionel's death.

"Thanks!" said Blake.

He hesitated. Perhaps it would be as well to inform this sergeant.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but aren't you Mr. Blake?" said the sergeant, bending keenly forward.

"Yes."

"Thought I recognised you, sir," said Sergeant Billing, pulling himself up and saluting smartly. "Evenin', Mr. Blake! Funny thing you should pull up just here!"

"Why is it funny?"

"Unless, of course, you've come to Streatham in connection with this rummy business," went on the sergeant, jerking a thumb vaguely towards the grass. "This mummified body, sir."

"I must confess," said Blake, "that I know nothing of any mummified body."

"Rudd found it, sir. He's the man on this beat," explained Sergeant Billing. "He ought to be back by now, too, with an ambulance. Queerest thing I ever struck, sir. Maybe you'd like to have a look at it?"

Sexton Blake did not hesitate. He climbed out of the car and joined Sergeant Billing on the grass. Anything unusual or bizarre always attracted him. It would only take a moment or two to have a look at this mummy, or whatever it was. Such a brief delay could not possibly affect the tragic affair at Stowe Lodge.

"Here you are, sir," said the sergeant eagerly. "Just have a look at it. Maybe you'll be able to make something of it, because I'm darned if I can!"

Tinker had joined them now, and Pedro was left in sole possession of the Grey Panther. He was not at all keen on this, for his ears were alert, his back was bristling slightly, and it was easy to see that the old dog scented something unusual.

"Very remarkable," said Blake slowly.

The sergeant had flashed his lantern on the queer, shrivelled figure that lay in the grass. Seldom, indeed, had Sexton Blake seen anything more grotesque. Tinker, gazing down at that withered form, caught his breath in.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It's—it's awful, gov'nor! How did it get shrivelled up like this?"

Blake did not answer. He was bending down, using his own electric torch. The sergeant gazed anxiously down the common towards the High Road.

"Rudd ought to have been back before now," he muttered. "Can't understand it. Would you mind waiting here a bit, sir, while I nip down to the corner?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"That's all right, sergeant," he said. "You can go if you wish. I'll remain in charge of this body."

"Thank you, sir!"

The sergeant saluted and hurried away.

"You haven't forgotten, I suppose, that we're due at Stowe Lodge?" asked Tinker, with a trace of sarcasm. "In fact, I believe there's a rumour to the effect that Sir Lionel Bland has been murdered."

Tinker was not at his best in the early hours of the morning, newly awakened from sleep.

Sexton Blake did not reply. He had turned the mummified head over, and was gazing intently at a curious mark on the left cheek.

"I thought so, Tinker, I thought so!" he said in a voice that was full of wonder. "This is the body of Smiler Dawson!"

"What, the man who committed that big burglary in Bayswater last year?"

"The same, Tinker. Smiler Dawson has, or had, a big reputation. A very smart man, and a prickly thorn in the side of Scotland Yard. Well he won't trouble them again."

"But what on earth has happened to him?" asked Tinker, staring. "Why, I thought this thing was a mummy, dressed up in ordinary clothes for some reason."

"His condition is extraordinary enough," confessed Blake. "For the moment I am baffled. I cannot understand how the man could have got into this singular condition."

"He must have been dead for days—weeks."

"He was alive yesterday, Tinker."

"Yesterday!" ejaculated Tinker, bending lower and subjecting the body to a closer examination. "But—but that's impossible, gov'nor! He's all dried up, like a mummy. Look at his leathery skin and his shrunken figure. He's all withered! There's practically no flesh left on him, sir! And you say that he was alive yesterday?"

"I do."

"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake, sir?" asked Tinker. "I mean— Hang it! This—this thing is more or less unrecognisable!"

"Yet I'll swear there are no scars like this in the whole world," said Blake, indicating the strange mark on the shrunken, leathery cheek. "But for this I doubt if I should have recognised the man by

*"Fingerprints, Tinker; two of them quite excellent. They may be the sergeant's or the constable's, but I doubt it..." A blinding flash of light, and the picture was taken.*



his features. I saw him at Charing Cross, and he was wearing this same suit, too. No, Tinker, there's no doubt— Hallo! What's this?"

Sexton Blake interrupted himself sharply and shifted the beam of his electric torch. Tinker could see nothing remarkable. The light was merely playing on a patch of half-dried, clayey earth. There was no grass at that particular spot.

"What is it, gov'nor?" asked Tinker.

"Fingerprints, young 'un. Two of them quite excellent," said Blake keenly. "They may be the sergeant's or the constable's, but I doubt it. There is no reason why either of those two men should have placed their hands on the ground. Anyhow, we'll take a photograph of them."

"You are always doing work for the police, gov'nor," said Tinker, with a sigh.

Blake snapped open his attache-case, removed a small camera, and made one or two swift preparations. There came a blinding flash of light, a click, and the camera was back again in the attache-case.

"It is just as well to be on the safe side, Tinker," said Blake. "In all probability, those fingerprints are valueless."

"They're valueless to us, anyhow," said Tinker. "We're not on this case, gov'nor."

"No, Tinker. But we might be," replied Sexton Blake, as he bent

down to examine the strange body again—"we might be!"

TWO minutes later a car came humming up the hill, and as it slowed down to a standstill behind the Grey Panther, Sexton Blake and Tinker guessed that it contained police-officers. As a matter of fact, Sergeant Billing had returned, not merely with Police-constable Rudd, but with a Scotland Yard man.

"Hallo, Lennard!" said Blake, smiling. "I didn't think this affair was important enough to bring you."

"Well, I'm hanged!" interrupted Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D. "If there's any queer thing happening within the area of Greater London, you're in it, Blake! How on earth do you smell 'em out?"

Blake laughed.

"In this particular instance, I'm here quite by accident," he said. "I came to Streatham on another errand, Lennard."

"So did I, if it comes to that," said the Yard man. "I was in the police station, when Rudd blew in, saying something about a mummy on Streatham Common. I thought I might as well come along and have a look at it!"

"Well, there it is," said Blake. "Let's know what you make of it, old man!"

P.-c. Rudd and the sergeant had already gone across to the body, carrying a stretcher.

"Just a moment!" called Blake. "Be careful how you walk there, sergeant! There are some fingerprints that might prove to be interesting!"

"Go easy!" said Lennard. "Mind where you're treading, sergeant!"

But it was too late. When Blake pointed out the spot, it was seen that the constable had practically obliterated the fingerprints by treading on that spot.

"Clumsy hoofs!" grumbled Lennard, under his breath. "Those prints might have been important!"

Tinker grinned, noting that Blake made no mention of the flashlight photograph he had taken. Obviously, Blake meant to examine those fingerprints himself before passing them on to the police.

Lennard was dumbfounded after he had examined the shrivelled body. And he, too, noted something familiar about that scar, lividly visible on the shrunken, leathery cheek.

"But it's impossible!" he said, looking up, in a startled way. "And yet—and yet— This is the body of Smiler Dawson. You know him, Blake?"

"I have met him," said Blake, nodding. "And I think you are right, Lennard. This is Dawson, without doubt!"

"But it's—it's uncanny!" protested the Yard man. "Why, hang it, I was talking to Dawson two or three hours ago!"

"It can't be the same, sir," said the sergeant. "This is a mummy! It must have been dead for years!"

"I tell you I was talking to this man at eleven o'clock in the West End," said the chief inspector, removing his bowler-hat and scratching his head. "He assured me he was going straight home to bed, and if he had told me that he was going to jump over the National Gallery, I should have placed just as much credit in the statement. What happened to him, Blake? Poison?"

"I know of no poison that would have this effect."

"Then it wasn't poison," said Lennard. "You're a bit of an uncanny beggar when it comes to poisons, Blake. You know 'em all! But what's happened to him? How can he have got like this since eleven o'clock? I've never seen anything like it!"

He continued to stare fascinatedly at that shrivelled figure, and he stood up whilst the sergeant and the constable gently lifted it upon the stretcher and conveyed it to the waiting car.

"Tinker and I must be going," said Blake. "We have delayed too long already. By the way, Lennard, did you hear anything at the Streatham Police Station concerning the death of Sir Lionel Bland?"

"Not a thing," said the Yard man. "Who is he, anyway?"

"I don't know. But he lives about a hundred yards farther along the common," said Blake. "I understand he has been murdered!"

"Oh, you do?" said Lennard, staring. "Streatham Common is looking up! Two murders in one night, eh?"

"There's no evidence that Dawson was murdered."

"Well, I'll swear he didn't commit suicide," said the chief inspector. "Dawson wasn't that sort. A decent fellow in many ways—although, of course, he was one of the cleverest burglars we ever had to deal with!"

Sexton Blake was frowning.

"I can't quite understand why the Streatham police have heard nothing about this other affair," he said. "Sir Lionel's butler rang me up, and I advised him to inform the police at once."

"I dare say this affair has caused a delay," said Lennard. "Anyhow, now that I'm on the spot, I might as well come with you, Blake. Any objection?"

"Not the slightest," said the famous Baker Street detective. "Come, Lennard, by all means! Your presence here is very opportune."

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Mystery of Stowe Lodge.

PRINGLE proved to be an elderly man, thin, wrinkled, and wheezy-voiced. As he opened the door of Stowe Lodge to admit the visitors he was trembling, and his face was utterly devoid of colour.

Stowe Lodge they had found, was a large, old-fashioned house, standing in its own garden, facing the common.

"I'm glad you've come, gentlemen!" said Pringle huskily. "I haven't dared to go and look at the poor master again! I've been pacing up and down the hall—"

"I think we can understand, Pringle," said Sexton Blake quietly. "I am Blake, and this is Tinker, my assistant. This gentleman is Chief-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ring up for a doctor, as I advised?"

"Yes, sir; but he hasn't come yet," replied the butler, clasping and unclasping his bony hands. "He wasn't in, sir, but somebody told me that he would be sent on as soon as he came back."

"And the police?"

"The police, sir?" said Pringle dully. "No, sir; I didn't tell the police."

"Why not?" broke in Lennard.

"I thought that Mr. Blake— He said he was coming, sir, and I waited," replied the butler. "I thought that Mr. Blake would be just the same."

It was evident that Pringle was distracted and exceedingly shaky from the shock of the night's grim business. Apparently he had been pacing up and down the hall, waiting, unable to take the responsibility on his worn old shoulders. Having telephoned to Sexton Blake, he had merely been marking time. A good servant, no doubt, and a faithful one, but useless in an emergency such as this.

"Have you any brandy in the house, Pringle?" asked Blake

"Yes, sir."

"Then take a dose," said the great detective, eyeing the butler keenly. "You're in a bad way, man."

"Never mind me, sir—never mind me!" muttered the old man. "It's the master! He's in the library, dead—murdered! What does it matter about me, sir? I'm nothing!"

"Pull yourself together, Pringle!" said the chief-inspector. "We're here now, and if this affair has been too much for you—"

"I want you to have a look at the master, gentlemen!" interrupted Pringle shakily. "He's in there—in the library!"

He pointed across the dimly-lit hall, and his voice dropped nearly to a whisper. Lennard had given him more than one suspicious glance, but Sexton Blake was convinced that Pringle was quite genuine. There was no play-acting in this sorry exhibition of shattered nerves.

Sexton Blake strode towards the library door, with the Yard man hard at his heels. Tinker, holding Pedro on a leash, remained in the rear. The butler stood aside, still clasping his hands, his breath coming and going in wheezing, noisy gulps. A more pitiful figure could scarcely have been imagined. The old butler was not merely terrified, but utterly broken.

Blake opened the library door, and stood for a moment gazing within. Lennard craned over his shoulder.

THEY saw a comfortable room, with an electric reading-lamp gleaming on the desk, shaded and warm-looking with its red hood. The remains of a fire glowed feebly in the grate, and the french windows, on the other side of the room, rattled and shook in the wind. There were many bookcases and odd tables here and there filled with untidy heaps of papers and opened volumes. This was the room of an untidy man—and for that very reason it looked comfortable and cosy.

But Sexton Blake took these details in within a second or two. His attention was attracted by the figure which sprawled on the carpet near the desk. Blake saw, too, the overturned chairs, the displaced fender, the rumpled hearth-rug, and the broken glass near by. The air reeked of whisky, the reason no doubt being that a decanter had been smashed.

"Aren't you going in?" asked Lennard politely.

Blake did not reply. He took a step forward into the room, and then he stood looking down at the body of the dead man. In that very

first glance Blake knew that Pringle's statement was correct. Sir Lionel Bland was dead—obviously, horribly dead. It was small wonder that the old butler was so distraught.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake, under his breath.

Accustomed as he was to such sights, he, nevertheless, found it necessary to grip himself firmly now.

The body of Sir Lionel Bland was lying face upwards, and the shaft of light from the reading-lamp fell full



... the sudden flashing of the officer's lamp.

upon the dead man's face. Pringle had acted sensibly in waiting out in the hall. There was something here that was well calculated to keep him away.

The dead man's face was badly battered—bloodstained, disfigured. And there appeared to be an ugly wound on the top of the head, too.

Sexton Blake, after the first moment of shock, went down on one knee and made a closer examination. The chief-inspector was beside him.

"No need for a doctor here!" muttered Lennard.

"Look at this!" said Blake.

He indicated a heavy black ruler which lay on the carpet near by. It was one of those round rulers, of ebony. One end of it was sticky with half-dried blood, and there were one or two hairs visible, too.

"Poor beggar! He must have been literally battered to death!" said Lennard soberly. "I imagine he received one or two heavy blows in the face to start with, and then, as he staggered forward, probably with his head down, the other blows got him."

"A very likely supposition," nodded Blake. "The facial injuries might easily have been caused a moment or two before the deathblow."

"It's easy to read what happened," said Lennard, as he looked keenly round. "There was a pretty bad struggle, and in the course of it Sir Lionel's assailant must have grabbed that ebony ruler off the table. He got in one or two blows, and while he had his victim half-dazed he completed the job. A savage, brutal, devilish attack!"

"Or it may have been done in a frenzy," said Blake slowly—"not necessarily savage and brutal, Lennard. In the heat of a struggle, with the intruder attempting to escape, he might conceivably have done Sir Lionel to death unintentionally in the very heat of his panic."

"Yes, he was an intruder, right enough," said Lennard, as he looked towards a corner of the room. "There's a safe over there—open, too. Looks to me as if Sir Lionel surprised him at his work, and then this happened."

**B**LAKE turned to the door and beckoned.

"No, sir; I'm not coming in!" panted the old butler, who was standing out in the hall. "You can't make me, either! I've been in once! I saw the poor master lying there, staring at me! I saw his poor smashed face! No, sir; I'm not coming in—"

"Nonsense!" said Blake, talking sharply in an endeavour to bring the old man to his senses. "It's all right. You won't see your master again—like that!"

He pulled a rug from the couch and spread it gently over the body. And Pringle, who saw the action, was reassured, and he entered. He cast a fearful, horrified glance at the huddled figure and the rug which covered it, and then he averted his gaze.

"Oh, the poor master!" he breathed wheezily. "I can't believe it, sir! And him so well and strong not many hours ago—"

"It's no good going on like that, Pringle," said Blake. "Your master is dead, and we must do everything we can to bring his murderer to justice. There does not seem to be much doubt that Sir Lionel was brutally done to death."

"He was, sir—that I'll swear!" panted the old man, his eyes shining. "I don't

know how, and I don't know why! The master hadn't an enemy in the world—"

"There's no question of an enemy, Pringle," put in Lennard. "This job was done by a burglar. Your master caught him at it, and there was a struggle. I dare say it was all over within a minute or two. These things happen very quickly, you know."

"Tell us everything you know of this unhappy affair," said Blake.

"I—I don't know anything, sir," faltered the butler, holding on to a bookcase for support. "What should I know? But yet, there's something I can tell you, I suppose. I woke up because I was worried about the master."

"We'll begin at the beginning if you don't mind," said Blake. "What does this household consist of, Pringle? What is Sir Lionel's family?"

"There's no family, sir," said the butler. "There's nobody. Leastways, there hasn't been for years. Lady Bland died twenty years ago, and since then the master has lived practically alone, buried in his books. There weren't any children, sir, and, as far as I know, no relatives at all."

"There is a housekeeper, I presume?"

"Yes, sir—Mrs. Long," said the Butler. "She and two maids are the only ones who make up the household. They're all asleep, thank Heaven! They don't know anything of this—yet! It'll be a rare shock for Mrs. Long in the morning—"

"Never mind the morning," interrupted Blake. "When did you go to bed, Pringle?"

"About eleven o'clock, sir."

"And Sir Lionel?"

"He stayed down in the library, sir, writing," replied the butler. "I didn't like it, somehow. It wasn't usual for the master to stay up late. He always went to bed at about half-past ten—regular as clockwork. I can't remember the time when he decided to stay downstairs writing. He always left me to lock up and put the lights out."

"But to-night he sent you to bed, saying that he would finish his writing and then follow?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm! Rather strange, that!" remarked Lennard, as he jotted down a note or two. "Strange, I mean, that this burglary should happen on such a night. I'm beginning to think that it wasn't a burglary at all. If Sir Lionel was down here, with a light going, no burglar would be fool enough to break in."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Blake, nodding. "Pringle, you had better sit down."

"Not in here, sir—not in here!" muttered the butler shakily.

"Very well, then," said Blake. "You say you went to bed, leaving Sir Lionel in the library?"

"Yes, sir. He said he wanted to do some writing," replied the butler. "I even left him some sandwiches in the dining-room, with a Thermos flask of hot coffee, as he said he would be very late."

"Did he eat those sandwiches and drink the coffee?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what was the first indication you had that a tragedy had taken place?"

"Well, I must have woke up at about one o'clock, sir," said the old man slowly. "I'd been sleeping badly—just on and off, as you might say. I was worried about the master."

"Merely because he was sitting up late?"

"Not only because of that, sir," said the butler. "He was queer all yesterday—queer in his manner, I mean.

Jumpy and nervous and worried. I didn't like him sitting up late—I thought perhaps there was more in it than he'd tell me."

"I dare say there was!" grunted Lennard.

"It seems I was woke up by a banging door, sir," continued Pringle. "It banged two or three times, and at last I got out of bed and went to the window. Then I saw that the library lights were still on, and I believed that the banging door was one of these french windows."

"And that struck you as being peculiar?"

"I couldn't understand it, sir. The master wouldn't have one of these windows open on such a cold, windy night. So I put some things on—"

"One moment. Your bed-room is, I take it, immediately over this library?"

"Not immediately over it, sir, but next door, as you might say."

"I see. Well, you heard this door banging, and you were puzzled. You came downstairs?"

"Yes, sir. I slipped some things on and came down," replied Pringle, his eyes closing and his voice dropping. "I came straight down and opened this door. And—and—"

He opened his eyes and turned them fascinatedly upon that huddled shape on the floor.

"I saw—that, sir!" he whispered. "As soon as I opened the door I saw—that!"

**I**T must have been a dreadful shock for you, Pringle," said Blake kindly. "What did you do?"

"I rushed over and knelt by the master's side," panted Pringle. "I shook him, but it wasn't any good. He was dead—and I knew he was dead. Then I looked round, and saw the overturned chairs, and—and that ruler! And I knew that the master had been killed by somebody. Yes, somebody who had gone out through the french windows and left them open!"

"What did you do after that?"

"I ran out into the hall, sir, and for some minutes I was mad," said Pringle shakily. "I—I don't seem to remember what I did. I only know that I suddenly came to myself, and I was crying like a baby. Ay, and I'm not ashamed to say it, either!" he added, with a note of defiance in his voice. "The poor master—"

"We quite understand," interrupted Blake. "Your emotion was perfectly natural, Pringle. You made no attempt to arouse the household?"

"It suddenly struck me, sir, that it would be a bad thing to have those women about," said Pringle. "They'd only start shrieking and fainting. Then I thought of you, sir."

"Why of me?" asked Blake, "Why not the police?"

"I don't know, sir. But the master had often spoken of you, and it so happened that your name was very prominent in yesterday's newspapers, sir," said the butler. "There was some big case over at Bristol, wasn't there, sir?"

"Yes, but the newspapers made an unnecessary fuss over it."

"Well, I thought of you, sir, and I thought you would be able to help," said the old man dully. "So I rang you up. And—and that's all I know, sir. I waited out in the hall, pacing up and down, or sitting on the stairs, or—"

"Are you usually a heavy sleeper, Pringle?" asked Blake abruptly.

"No, sir; it doesn't take much to wake me up as a rule."

"And when you went to bed you were particularly restless?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"And do you assure me that you heard no sounds of a struggle?"

The butler looked surprised, then startled.

"Ay, that's right, sir!" he said wonderingly. "My, but that's queer, isn't it? No, sir, I didn't hear the struggle."

"You heard nothing until that door started banging?"

"That's right, sir."

"Very queer!" commented Lennard grimly. "You're quite sure, Pringle, aren't you, that you didn't hear any struggle?"

"I'm certain, sir," replied the butler, looking at him. "Why, you don't think that I'd say I was certain if I wasn't?"

"You must have been sleeping heavier than you thought," grunted the Yard man. "And, after all, the struggle might easily have taken place within a bare minute. It doesn't take long to knock a few chairs over. What I can't understand is why any burglar should break into this place while the downstairs lights were on. It doesn't fit in at all."

"The man who did this, sir, couldn't have been a burglar," said Pringle, speaking more steadily than he had done yet. "Why should a burglar come here? The poor master had nothing."

"Nothing in the safe?" asked Blake.

"A few notes, perhaps, sir; but not more than five or six pounds," said Pringle. "And that money—as Heaven knows—was needed urgently enough."

"Are we to understand by this, Pringle, that your master was financially unsound?"

"If you mean that he was nearly ruined, sir—yes," replied the butler. "That's why I was so uneasy when I went to bed. I knew that the poor master was worried because of his money matters. Everything had gone wrong just lately."

"How do you mean? Wasn't Sir Lionel substantial?"

"He was some months ago, sir," said Pringle bitterly. "His investments were sound; and, although his income wasn't what you might call handsome, it was regular. It's always been a bit of a struggle, sir, to keep up appearances here. But the master was like that—ready to go short rather than let people know he was having a struggle."

"Sir Lionel Bland was not the only man to do that," said Blake quietly. "What happened recently to bring a change?"

"Why, some seven or eight months ago, Sir Lionel got interested in gramophone shares," said the butler sadly. "He got rid of all his good investments and put his money into one or two of these shaky gramophone companies—when the shares were booming at their highest. I warned him, sir; I told him that it was too much of a gamble."

"You seemed to be very much in your master's confidence," remarked Lennard, glancing up.

"I was, sir; he still owes me eight or nine months' wages," said the old man simply. "But there! Not that I minded. I've been in the master's service since I was a lad—and hoped to die in it."

"Fate has decreed otherwise," said Blake gently. "Now, Pringle, having told us so much, you might as well be perfectly frank. Sir Lionel, then, was on the verge of ruin?"

"Yes, sir," muttered the old man. "When it was too late he sold out his gramophone shares. Leastways, he tried to. But one company went smash—the company that had taken nearly all the master's money. He tried hard during the past few weeks to pull things round, but they only got worse. There was a big crash coming. And when

the master told me last night that he was going to sit up late I was uneasy."

"You don't think he meant to make away with himself?" asked the chief-inspector bluntly.

"No, sir, not that. But it seemed to me that he was expecting something; and, although I asked him, he wouldn't tell me."

Sexton Blake glanced at Tinker, and then at Lennard. There were some very peculiar points about this case; and Blake, at least, was certain that everything was not as it appeared to be. Somewhere, vague at the moment, there was another thread.

The problem was to find that thread—and to connect it up.



## CHAPTER 3.

### Discoveries.

CHIEF-DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD moved over towards the safe and stood looking at it for some moments in silence.

"Queer that there should be some loose currency notes lying in the safe in full sight!" he remarked. "Queer kind of burglar to leave loot behind!"

"There's only a matter of five or six pounds, sir," said Pringle, looking up. "That's all the money the master had—in cash, anyway. I know that, sir, because I put it in the safe myself."

Lennard looked at him sharply. Once or twice, indeed, Blake had found the Yard man giving Pringle a very close, suspicious scrutiny. And Blake could easily read Lennard's thoughts.

The C.I.D. man, in fact, was wondering if Pringle's story was a fabrication from start to finish. He evidently had an idea that there had been no burglar—no intruder of any kind. Working

on this line, it was easy enough to form a theory that Pringle had had a quarrel—perhaps over that very money—and had struck Sir Lionel down with the ruler in the course of the struggle.

But Sexton Blake did not give this theory a moment's consideration. He accepted Pringle's story in every detail; he knew that the old man was telling the perfect truth. There was something sincere, something genuine, about him. Never for a moment did Blake doubt him.

"Well, it's darned peculiar, that's all I can say!" grunted Lennard. "We're to believe, I suppose, that a stray burglar broke into this house while Sir Lionel was still up and about? And, having broken in, the man kills Sir Lionel, and then bolts without taking this money, which is staring him in the face."

"The safe, you will observe, Lennard, has been forced," said Blake.

Lennard started.

"Well, that's true," he admitted, as he looked at the safe again. "But why call it a safe? This one must have come out of the ark! Any up-to-date burglar can open a door like this as though it were made of match-boarding."

"And a burglar named Smiler Dawson was famous for his safe-breaking activities," remarked Tinker from the doorway, speaking for the first time.

Lennard looked at him.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "You young ass! You're not suggesting that Dawson broke into this house, are you?"

"Well, isn't it rummy that Dawson should have been found out there on the common?" asked Tinker defiantly. "The gov'nor's thought of it, I'll bet, although he hasn't said anything. There's a burglary here, and a murder. And during the same night—almost at exactly the same hour—a notorious crook is found out on the common, as dead as mutton. But we know he couldn't have been dead long, because you were talking to him an hour before midnight, Mr. Lennard. How do you



know he didn't come straight here, to this house?"

"It sounds plausible; but it's all wrong!" said the Yard man gruffly. "Dawson wouldn't do it. Hang it, I've known Smiler for years. A clever man—a thoroughly cool card—and the very devil of a safe-breaker. But I'll swear he wouldn't use violence! No. The Smiler wasn't a killer."

"You are judging by his record?" asked Blake.

"What else can we judge men by?" retorted the Yard man. "We've had track of Smiler for years. He's been through our hands again and again; he's done penal servitude, too. But not once has he been put away for any act of violence. By nature, Dawson was a cheerful, happy-go-lucky fellow. You simply couldn't help liking him, although he was a fool to waste his talents on burglary. Still, there it is; some men have these kinks. But the

go ahead better if Pringle was out of the way; so the old man was led into the dining-room, and he was ordered to lie down and rest. He protested at first, but easily succumbed. The old fellow was on the point of collapse.

Just at that time, too, a knock sounded at the front door, and when Tinker opened it, he found a tall, distinguished-looking stranger, who introduced himself as the doctor.

"I hadn't the faintest idea that there was anything really seriously wrong here," he explained to Blake and Lennard, after he had introduced himself. "I was away when the telephone message came from Pringle. My wife took it, as a matter of fact, and she understood that Sir Lionel was merely indisposed. But you tell me that Sir Lionel is dead! I am greatly shocked!"

Dr. Turner was more than shocked when he heard some of the details. It appeared that he had attended Sir

the adjoining room," he said, pursing his lips. "We can get on better then."

And this was done—although the body was in no way interfered with. Blake and Lennard took it into the next room, and laid it gently on a lounge. The doctor was only allowed to take a brief look—just to assure himself that death was certain.

The medical gentleman considered himself affronted. And, indeed, he took himself off home almost immediately, refusing to wait until the police doctor arrived.

"If the case is in his hands, all well and good!" he said tartly. "There appears to be no reason why I should remain!"

"Infernally touchy, some of these doctors!" said Lennard, with a frown. "Why can't they understand?"

"Well, you might have let him make an examination," said Tinker. "What harm could it have done?"

"That's not the point," said Lennard. "The man's dead—definitely dead—and I'm not going to have him mauled about until our fellows have done their work."

"Cæsar hath spoken!" murmured Tinker solemnly.

"You'll get a thick ear, my lad, unless you're careful!" warned the C.I.D. man, with a snort.

**I**T was Tinker, as it happened, who made an interesting discovery about five minutes later.

While Blake and Lennard were having a look at the safe, Tinker opened the french windows, and strolled out on to the paved terrace, which ran along the side of the house. And Tinker had hardly got outside before he uttered a startled exclamation.

"I say, guv'nor!" he sang out. "There's something here!"

Blake and Lennard were quickly outside, and they found Tinker examining a small handbag. He had found it lying on its side, just outside the door, near some ornamental trellis-work which separated the terrace from the lawn.

"This looks interesting!" said Lennard, as he glanced inside. "Tools! Screwdrivers—spanners—chisels—drills. A burglar's kit, in fact."

"There's blood here!" said Blake, as he flashed his torch upon the outside of the bag.

"H'm! Then there was a burglar," said Lennard, frowning. "But why on earth should he leave his kit out here?"

"If it comes to that, why on earth did he bring it out of the library at all?" asked Sexton Blake. "Doesn't it strike you as being strange, Lennard?"

"How—strange?"

"Well, after the man had battered his victim to death so brutally, you would hardly think that he would be cool enough to seize his tools and carry them out with him," replied Blake. "And, having done that, why should he leave them here?"

"That's easy, guv'nor," said Tinker. "Come and have a look at this!"

There were several spots of blood on the terrace, just against the trellis-work. And there was a rusty metal projection, half-way up the trellis, apparently the remains of some sort of metal ornamentation, which had long since gone to ruin. There were some scraps of material adhering to this rusty spike—and it was bloodstained, too.

Sexton Blake's eyes gleamed. "It seems to me, Lennard, that you'll have to reconstruct your ideas concerning Smiler Dawson," he said quietly. "This kit of tools obviously belonged to Dawson."

"How do you know that?"



*The butler started forward, a hoarse cry in his throat. "The master—Oh, my poor master! What have you done? He's so changed! Shrunken—all dried up!"*

Smiler was clean—and on three separate occasions that I know of he had allowed himself to be handed over to the police rather than make any attack."

"It wasn't like him then, to do this?" said Blake.

"Like him! He didn't do it, I tell you," said Lennard. "He wasn't that sort."

**P**RINGLE evinced no interest in what they were saying. He was standing there, still holding the bookcase, like a man in a dream. Unless he was spoken to, and jerked into a sense of realities, he remained like this.

Blake felt that the investigation would

Lionel Bland for many years, and now, to find him battered to death in this way was a rather staggering blow.

He wanted to make a very careful examination, but Lennard intervened.

"I am sorry," said the Yard man. "But you'll have to wait, Dr. Turner. I have been in communication with Scotland Yard, and the police doctor will soon be here—to say nothing of draughtsmen and photographers. Until they've finished their work, you'll have to wait. Sir Lionel is dead, so you can't do anything, anyhow."

"I suppose I must comply with the regulations," said the doctor stiffly. "At the same time, it strikes me as being very absurd. I am anxious to discover the full extent of the injuries, and what was the precise cause of death."

But Lennard remained obdurate; he would not allow the body to be touched—even its position could not be altered; at least, not until he had made a chalk mark on the carpet, all round the body.

"It might be as well to carry it into

"Look at these scraps of material," said Blake. "It is precisely the same tweed as Dawson's suit. That man was here, Lennard—without question. Did you examine Dawson's body thoroughly?"

"Not very thoroughly," said Lennard. "In that shrivelled condition—"

"Dawson's left arm, just above the wrist, was badly gashed," said Blake.

"I noticed it particularly — although the wound did not show very greatly, owing to the extraordinary shrivelling of the flesh. Yet it is fairly easy to reconstruct a portion of this tragedy. Dawson fled from the library, carrying his bag with him. He attempted to dash on to the lawn, but must have caught his arm on this metal projection."

"Looks like it," admitted Lennard.

"The sudden shock probably caused him to lose his grip of the bag, and it is even possible that he dropped it without being aware of the fact," continued Blake. "At all events, this definitely connects Smiler Dawson with the crime. He was here, Lennard. It was he who opened that safe—he who dropped this bag."

"But was it he who killed Sir Lionel?" asked Lennard. "That's the question. It looks darned suspicious, but I can't quite swallow it. Dawson wasn't that kind of man, I tell you. He may have been driven to it, of course—he may have been in a frenzy. But then, if he had been in a frenzy, he would hardly have stopped to collect his bag, would he? Hang it, this affair is puzzling!"

"And doubly puzzling when you remember what Dawson was like when he was found," said Blake. "What could have happened to the man after he fled from this house?"

"It's a regular twister, guv'nor," said Tinker. "If Dawson killed Sir Lionel Bland, who killed Dawson? That's the teaser! And how was Dawson killed? How, in the name of all that's marvellous, could he have been mummified like that? Think of the time, too!"

"How do you mean?" asked Lennard.

"Why, that policeman found Dawson's body at about one o'clock, didn't he?" asked Tinker. "Well, this business here happened at very much the same time. We don't know definitely, but it seems to me that Smiler Dawson must have been alive at about half-past twelve, or a quarter to one. And yet, at one o'clock, he was out there on the common—shrivelled all up and dried like a roasted peanut!"

"It couldn't have been done!" said Lennard, with a grunt. "It's impossible, Blake."

"We can't say that," replied Sexton Blake. "We don't know what happened to Dawson—we don't know what caused him to meet with such a terrible end."

"Do you think something could have happened to him here?" asked the Yard man. "I mean, is it possible that Sir Lionel did anything to him? By George! That's an idea, you know!" he added sharply. "Supposing that Sir Lionel monkeyed with him in some way? Dawson, knowing that he was dying, got into a frenzy, and battered Sir Lionel to death. Then he managed

to scramble out, only to collapse on the common."

"An ingenious theory, Lennard, but there is nothing whatever to support it," said Blake. "Why should Sir Lionel Bland monkey with a chance burglar who happened to break open his safe? Indeed, isn't it rather improbable that a law-abiding citizen like Sir Lionel should do something so

drastic that Dawson inevitably died? No, Lennard, I can't see it. Besides, we hit upon the same snag again. What extraordinary force was it that brought Dawson to such a terrible end?"

But, as to that, they had to admit that they were baffled.



"... the poor master lying there."

A FEW minutes later, Sexton Blake took Tinker aside and had some private words with him.

"You'd better take the car, and shoot back to Baker Street, Tinker," said Blake. "Develop that photograph as quickly as you can, and take a couple of prints. Then come back here."

"You think those finger-prints might be connected with this case, guv'nor?"

"Smiler Dawson is connected with this case—and therefore it stands to reason that those finger-prints might equally be connected with it," said Blake. "Be as quick as you can, Tinker—and by the time you get back I shall probably be ready to leave."

Tinker was soon off. And as soon as he had gone, Blake's next move was to bring Pedro into use.

"I think there's a chance here, Lennard, of satisfying ourselves on one point," said Blake. "There's nothing to definitely connect this burglar's kit with Smiler Dawson—but if Pedro leads the way from this house to the spot where Dawson was found dead, there won't be any further uncertainty, will there?"

"None whatever," agreed Lennard. "It's a good idea."

Pedro was given a good sniff at the handbag, and the clever old dog did not hesitate a moment, once he had got outside on the veranda. There were those spots of blood, too—which, to Pedro, were even more satisfactory. With such a scent, it was impossible for him to fail in this task.

As Sexton Blake had suspected, the trail was short.

Pedro, pulling at the leash, shot across the lawn, and then cut into the drive, near the gates. He went right out into the road, and Chief-Inspector Lennard waited in the gateway—for even though the distance would probably prove short, he had no intention of leaving the premises.

Curiously enough, however, Pedro lost the scent soon after he had turned out of the gateway of Stowe Lodge. He ran about in all directions, his back bristling, his nose working overtime; but he was at a loss.

"What's the matter?" asked Lennard. "What's he fooling about like that for?"

"I don't know—unless there's been a good deal of traffic on this road since Dawson left," replied Blake. "That may be the explanation. Or, on the other hand, Dawson himself might have had a car waiting."

"I never knew Smiler to own a car,"

replied Lennard. "And he didn't work with a gang, either."

Sexton Blake felt, for once, that he was in an ideal position. For he knew exactly where Smiler Dawson had been found dead. Ordinarily, if Pedro lost a trail, any such chase ended in failure. But it was different now.

Blake pulled the clever bloodhound along by force and, sure enough, fifty or sixty yards farther down the road, Pedro suddenly gave a whine, and leapt forward once more. He had picked up the trail again—as hot as ever. But now it was at the extreme edge of the road, near the common.

It indicated that Smiler Dawson had kept to the middle of the road until he had reached this spot—and that the trail had consequently been obliterated by the passing of many vehicles.

Pedro led the way on to the grass, and within a few seconds he had reached that fatal spot where Dawson had been found. And beyond this Pedro could not go. The trail was ended—as Blake knew perfectly well. It was the last trail that Smiler Dawson would ever make.

"Well, Lennard, that proves it," said the great detective, after he had returned to the gate of Stowe Lodge. "Without a shadow of doubt, Dawson was the man who broke into Sir Lionel's library. Pedro has given us the positive evidence."

"That's true enough," admitted Lennard. "If that bag belonged to anybody else, Pedro would have picked up a totally different trail. But I can't get the hang of it. I can't understand why Dawson should have committed such a brutal crime. Then, again, how did Dawson himself meet with his own end? Who killed him? And why?"

"When we know that, we shall probably know why Sir Lionel Bland was so atrociously done to death," said Sexton Blake. "Does it not occur to you, Lennard, that the one man might be responsible for the two deaths?"

"You mean that somebody murdered Sir Lionel and the Smiler?"

"Exactly!"

"Then why isn't Sir Lionel shrivelled up?" demanded Lennard.

"That's an interesting point," admitted Blake. "If one is shrivelled, then why not the other? There's another stumbling-block in the absence of any indication of this mythical third person."

INDOORS, they looked into Sir Lionel Bland's diary, which stood on the desk. There was just a chance that they would gain some information from this private volume, but it afforded surprisingly little. Sir Lionel had confined most of his notes to comments on the weather; what letters he had written during the day; notes on favourite books he had read; and suchlike unimportant trifles.

There was only one point worthy of note. In the entries of the last week or so there were several references to "Dr. L."

"Now, I wonder who this merchant can be?" said Lennard, frowning. "Here he is again: 'Heard from Dr. L. this morning—not very encouraging.' And here's another: 'Wrote to Dr. L. to-day; hoping for the best.' It can't mean Dr. Turner, because the initial is different, anyhow—and he wouldn't need to write to his family doctor."

"Here's another one," said Blake, as he turned over another page. "Good news! Dr. L. has promised."

"I wish he had been a bit more explicit in his entries," grumbled Lennard. "What's the good of making jottings like this?"

"Well, a diary is generally a private volume," said Blake dryly. "We're not supposed to understand these entries, Lennard. In all probability, this Dr. L. is a perfectly innocuous person, who is in no remote way connected with our investigation."

"I thought, perhaps, we should find some reference to to-night," said Lennard. "It strikes me that Sir Lionel might have had an appointment with somebody—this Dr. L., for example. Yet there's no reference to it."

"And there's no evidence that any such appointment was kept," said Blake. "No, Lennard, we've got to admit that we're at a loose end. There's a deep mystery here. Dawson's connection with the affair only complicates it, I'm afraid. I don't believe he murdered Sir Lionel Bland. And it is equally certain that Sir Lionel Bland did not murder him."

Lennard rose to his feet.

"Well, by the sound of it, here are the fellows from the Yard," he said. "About time, too!"

He was right. A number of alert men had just arrived by car. Lennard was in full charge, and he proceeded to give his instructions.

Old Pringle turned out now. He had been aroused, no doubt, by the sound of many voices—and there was another complication, owing to the fact that the housekeeper had appeared upon the scene, flurried and startled. Lennard himself went upstairs to reassure her.

And Blake had a few words with the old butler.

"I really think, Pringle, that you had better go to bed," said Blake. "These Scotland Yard men have taken complete possession of the house now. There'll be no peace for many hours to come. And there is nothing that you can do."

"Maybe you're right, sir," said Pringle huskily. "Now that the poor master has gone there's precious little that I can do."

"By the way, Pringle, do you know anything of a Dr. L.?" asked Blake.

The old man looked astonished.

"Dr. L., sir?" he repeated. "How do you spell it, sir?"

"You don't spell it," said Blake. "The 'L' is merely an initial. I understand that Sir Lionel was acquainted with a certain Dr. L. I thought perhaps that you could give me the full name?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Pringle slowly, shaking his head. "I never heard the master talk about any Dr. L. Dr. Turner has always been our doctor, sir."

"Well, never mind," said Blake. "You had better get up to bed, Pringle."

He was leading the old man out into the hall, when Chief-Inspector Lennard appeared in a doorway farther down.

"Blake!" he shouted urgently. "Come here—quick!"

"What is it now?" muttered Pringle shakily. "What are they shouting about, sir?"

"It's all right; take no notice," said Blake.

But he was struck by Lennard's urgent tone. And he quickly went down the hall, and found the chief-inspector with an expression of blank, bewildered amazement on his square-cut face.

"What is it, Lennard?" asked Blake keenly.

"Well, I've seen a few queer things in my time, but, by the Lord Harry, this is about the queerest!" said the Yard man hoarsely. "Go in there, Blake! Go and have a look at that body!"

Sexton Blake strode into the room—that room where Sir Lionel Bland's body had been taken. He found two or three of the Scotland Yard men collected round the couch. And there, lying on it, were the remains of Sir Lionel Bland—shrivelled grotesquely, wizened and shrunken and mummified!

## CHAPTER 4.

### A Surprising Development!

**S**EXTON BLAKE could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

Undoubtedly this was the same body. There had been no substitution—no jiggery-pokery of that kind. Yet, while the remains of Sir Lionel Bland had lain in this adjoining room they had become shrivelled and shrunken—exactly like the remains of Smiler Dawson, the burglar!

And the effect was staggering.

The body looked smaller, thinner; a mere collection of bones and skin inside the folds of the clothing. The face had become leathery and taut; and the ugly wounds, so ghastly before, were now mercifully toned down. In their shrivelled, mummified condition they did not look at all horrifying. Yet the effect of the whole remarkable change was far more horrifying than anything else.

For it conjured up such dread possibilities, such strange thoughts.

How had this thing been done? And by whom? It was a totally unlooked-for development; a shock even for the hardened detectives.

"What do you make of it, Blake?" asked Lennard abruptly.

"What can I make of it?" retorted Blake. "When we put this body in here it was normal. As far as I can tell there is no trace of any drug, or any poison. How this shrivelling effect was caused is a complete mystery. It is something absolutely new, something we have never encountered before. The man can hardly have been battered to death—and poisoned."

"It's uncanny, that's what it is!" said Lennard. "What on earth are we to think now? Originally we believed that Dawson had been killed by this shrivelling business. But we know that Sir Lionel was killed by an assault; and he was mummified afterwards. Therefore, it couldn't have been poison, or drugs. He was perfectly all right until we brought him in here. And yet there's nothing in this room to account for the change."

"Nothing whatever," agreed Blake, looking round.

"There's another piece of news about Smiler, too," went on Lennard. "I've just heard it from some of these fellows. He wasn't killed by the shrivelling, as we thought."

"No?"

"He was crushed to death!" said Lennard impressively.

"Crushed?"

"Literally crushed!" said the Yard man. "When the body was examined at the mortuary it was found that practically all the poor blighter's ribs were broken—absolutely smashed in! His inside was—well, mangled."

"That's very remarkable," said Blake, frowning.

"Not a sign on the outside of the body, mind you," continued Lennard. "Nothing, except that little cut on the arm, where Smiler caught against that projecting spike. How the man was killed we don't know, but he must have died almost at once. It's almost as though some monstrous animal—a grizzly bear, for example—had caught him in its arms and crushed the life out of him."

"And this must have happened out there on Streatham Common," said Blake slowly. "If I'm not getting along famously, Lennard! The deeper we probe the more complicated the inquiry becomes! Yet surely there must be a thread somewhere."

"A thread?" repeated Lennard. "Hang it, there are dozens of threads. The trouble is we can't connect them together."

"It's a pity we didn't get here earlier," said the police doctor regretfully. "I should have been better pleased if I had seen this body in its normal state."

"Can you suggest what has happened to it?" asked Blake.

"I can't," replied the doctor. "I've never seen anything like it in all my career. You say that the body was normal when you brought it in here?"

"Absolutely normal."

"Well, I can't understand it," said the doctor. "Has anybody been in this room?"

"Not that we know of."

"And there's no trace of poison," said the doctor. "Besides, if there had been poison, it would have manifested itself long before. Under no circumstances would it have caused this strange shrivelling process so many hours after death. That's impossible; for in a dead body poison is more or less inactive."

"It largely depends upon the poison, of course," said Blake thoughtfully. "However, I agree with you, doctor, in thinking that poison is in no way connected with this particular case. This shrivelling could not have been caused by such means. It's something else—something new to us."

Old Pringle, the butler, appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Blake, sir, you're wanted," he said tentatively. "The telephone, sir—"

"All right, Pringle—I'll come," said Blake.

The butler suddenly started forward, a hoarse cry in his throat.

"The master—the master!" he panted, horrified. "What have you done with him? Oh, my poor master! What have you done?"

"Steady—steady!" said Lennard gruffly. "We've done nothing to him."

"But—but he's so changed!" croaked Pringle, staring fascinatedly at the body. "He's all shrunken—he's all dried up! What have you done to him?" he added fiercely, as he glared round.

"We cannot explain this phenomenon, Pringle," said Blake quietly. "This extraordinary change has come about since your master's body was moved."

"There's devilry afoot!" moaned the old man. "I knew it! Oh, what's going to happen now? It's a shame to treat the poor master so!"



... Pedro was at a loss.

Sexton Blake left the demented man in Lennard's care, and he hurried to the telephone. As he had expected, Tinker was at the other end.

"That you, gov'nor?" came Tinker's eager voice.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I've developed that photograph, sir, and I've made a discovery!" said Tinker breathlessly. "I had a look through our records before I rang up, and—"

"You have identified those fingerprints?"

"Yes, gov'nor!"

"Whose are they?"

"Waldo's!" said Tinker impressively.

Sexton Blake was so startled that he nearly jumped.

"Waldo's!" he repeated sharply. "Do you really mean that, Tinker?"

"Yes, gov'nor," panted Tinker. "They're old Waldo's, without a shadow of a doubt! I've compared them, and—"

"Stay where you are, Tinker," said Blake crisply. "I'll join you as quickly as possible."

And, without saying another word, he hung up the receiver. When he reappeared before Chief Inspector Lennard and the other Yard men, he was as calm and self-possessed as ever.

"There seems to be no reason why I should remain, Lennard," he said. "I think I'll get back to Baker Street. Tomorrow, perhaps, I'll look you up."

"Just as you like," said Lennard, not without a shade of disappointment in his voice. "So you're giving it up as a bad job, Blake, are you?"

"Not exactly; but I don't think I can be of any further use here," replied Blake.

"It's a dirty trick, leaving me in the lurch like this," grumbled Lennard. "The whole case is bristling with spikes, and I'm hanged if I know which way to turn. Still, you can do as you like, of course."

And Sexton Blake did.

**I**T happened that one of the police cars was speeding back to Scotland Yard almost at once, and Blake took advantage of this. He obtained a quick ride to Charing Cross, and from there he went to Baker Street by a stray taxi. It was beginning to rain a bit now, although the drops were only few and far between. The wind was as blustery and as bitter as ever.

Blake found Tinker excited and worried. Even Pedro seemed to scent that something special was in the wind, for he remained alert and eager.

"Your information, Tinker, brought me home at post-haste," said Blake. "And, as you can well imagine, I've been thinking pretty furiously on the way. So our old friend, Rupert Waldo, is mixed up in this remarkable case?"

"He must be, sir—because those fingerprints you found on that mud near Dawson's body were Waldo's," said Tinker. "Yet it's awful to believe that old Waldo is on the crook again. He's been going square for months—more than a year, in fact."

"But Waldo has always called himself a Wonder-Man—and he has never ceased to give us surprises," said Blake grimly. "I wonder if he has drifted back into his old criminal ways?"

"Then he must have done it on the quiet, sir," said Tinker. "He's still advertising his services in the papers, as usual. He's the Peril Expert—ready to undertake any perilous task. I thought he was going straight."

"Let me look at that photograph," said Blake.

He took it, and compared it closely

with the records of Rupert Waldo's finger-prints.

There was no shadow of doubt.

The photograph was a good one. Three of the prints were smudged, but two of them were excellent—clear cut and decisive. And the sharp shadows of the flashlight threw the ridge patterns into strong relief. They were identical with the first two fingers of Waldo's left hand. Sexton Blake was really startled, for he had not even remotely connected Waldo with this strange case. But now that he knew of the Wonder-Man's connection, ugly trains of thought were set into motion.

"Smiler Dawson was crushed to death, Tinker," said Blake quietly. "Seven of his ribs were smashed, and internally he was crushed to pulp. At least, so Lennard tells me."

Tinker stared, open-eyed.

"You—you mean—"

"Waldo's strength, Tinker, is capable of crushing any man to death," said Blake.

"But it's impossible!" protested Tinker. "Waldo wouldn't do a thing like that, gov'nor! I don't believe it! It—it's unthinkable! He's going straight! Waldo's a friend of ours now—he's one of the best! I'm not going to believe that he could commit two murders like this—two such vile and brutal murders! No, gov'nor, it's too thick!"

"There is really no need, Tinker, for you to get so excited," said Blake admonishingly. "If Waldo had had any hand in this dreadful affair—any guilty hand—I shall be just as disappointed as you. But with such evidence in our possession, we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that Waldo was on Streatham Common. And as Smiler Dawson is definitely associated with the tragedy of Stowe Lodge, it therefore stands to reason that Waldo, too, must have had a hand in that same grim business."

"But I'll swear it wasn't a guilty hand, gov'nor," declared Tinker.

"You seem to have plenty of faith in Waldo," said Blake dryly.

"He's been a crook, but he's never done anything dirty," said Tinker. "And for many months past he has been as square as a chess-board."

"Well, we won't have any hard thoughts about Waldo until we have made a few investigations," said Blake briskly. "Come along, Tinker, we're going to Waldo's chambers. The sooner we thrash this matter out the better. I shall have to surrender this finger-print photograph to the police in the morning, and before doing that I want to find out exactly what Waldo's position is."

**T**HE Grey Panther made short work of the brief trip from Baker Street to Charing Cross. Within a few minutes Sexton Blake and Tinker were at Rupert Waldo's door—and Pedro was with them again.

London was now beginning to stir, although dawn was still an hour or two away.

The Wonder-Man's chambers were just off the Strand, and they were quite palatial. On the impressive front door there was a big brass plate, bearing the words: "Rupert Waldo, Peril Expert." And in a corner was the invitation: "Walk in."

The door, of course was now locked, and there was no response to Blake's repeated rings. The bell could be heard buzzing somewhere in the flat, but nobody came to open the door.

"He's out, of course," said Tinker. "You didn't expect to find him in, gov'nor, did you?"

"I have learned never to expect anything where Waldo is concerned," replied Blake. "The fact that there is no answer to our rings does not convince me that Waldo is out. However, we shall soon see."

And the criminologist produced a bunch of strange-looking keys from his pocket, and he coolly proceeded to try them, one after another, in the lock.

"Oh, we're going to break in, then?" grinned Tinker.

"I am merely accepting this invitation, young 'un," said Blake, as he indicated, the "walk in" inscription on the brass plate. "Ah, that's better! I don't think we shall be long now."

One of those delicate keys had done the trick, and after a little careful probing and "wangling," the key turned, and the door silently opened.

They went in, and found themselves in a well-furnished lobby. Blake switched on the electric light, and then passed through into a kind of consulting-room, very sumptuously appointed.

Leading out of this was a comfortable study—obviously Waldo's private den. There was a bed-room adjoining, and a bath-room, too. All these rooms were empty.

"He's certainly away from home, Tinker," said Blake at length.

"There's another room here, sir," said Tinker.

It proved to be a kind of laboratory. Waldo, the Wonder-Man, had a perfect mania for making experiments, and in his new profession, too, he frequently found it necessary to use his laboratory.

At present the room contained an amazing collection of electrical apparatus. Even Sexton Blake could not understand what most of it was for.

There was a big switchboard, a dynamo, and an enormous instrument with dozens of enormously large wireless valves. At least, they appeared to be wireless valves. And there were coils, and condensers, and endless other gadgets.

"What's all this stuff for, sir?" asked Tinker, staring round.

"Don't ask me!" replied Blake. "An invention of Waldo's, probably. The man is extraordinarily clever—as we know."

They went back into the study—and found Waldo himself sprawling in one of the easy-chairs, smoking placidly, with Pedro nuzzling him.

## CHAPTER 5.

### The Living Tomb!

**R**UPERT WALDO waved a cheery hand.

"Awful, decent of you, Blake, to look me up like this," he said complacently. "There is always something charming about a surprise visit."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Tinker. "How on earth did you get here?"

"As a matter of fact, I came in through the front doorway," explained Waldo. "No doubt you expect me to dive down the chimney, or break in through an open window—or, perhaps, you have a suspicion that I enter my own home by means of a secret panel through one of the walls. Frightfully sorry to disillusion you, Tinker, old man, but, honestly, I generally use the front door. An infernally prosaic method for such a wonderful fellow as myself, but truth will out."

He gently pushed Pedro away from him, for the old dog's expressions of affection were getting embarrassing.

Pedro's tongue was liable to be a nuisance.

"Look here, Waldo! I'd like to have a few straight words with you," said Sexton Blake. "Under ordinary circumstances, I would not have entered your chambers in this way. But it is very necessary that I should have a talk with you."

"Go ahead!" said Waldo invitingly. "As you may know, I'm always delighted to see you. Drop round any old time you like. All the same, isn't it a bit thick for you to burgle the place? I hate using such a hard word—"

"I've already told you, Waldo, that my present action was justified," said Blake. "I want you to tell me, here and now, how you are connected with the Streatham affair."

Waldo did not turn a hair—although Blake was watching him closely and expectantly. The Wonder-Man merely raised his eyebrows slightly, and rose to his feet. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man, youngish and bronzed and lithe. Yet, although his frame was well-proportioned, there was nothing to indicate the enormous, startling strength which rippled beneath the smartly cut lounge suit.

Yet Waldo's muscles were like steel cables, and when it came to action, Waldo was always a shade quicker than the other man. There was something different in his constitution—something amazingly electrical. During his criminal career, he had been the despair of Scotland Yard; but nowadays he was working on the side of law and order, and, what was more, he was making a remarkable handsome income out of it.

"The Streatham affair?" he repeated inquiringly.

"You needn't pretend that you know nothing about it," said Blake. "I have definite evidence in my possession that you were on Streatham Common during the night."

"Oh!" said Waldo. "And is Streatham Common prohibited ground? Am I, for some obscure reasons, debarred from taking a stroll on Streatham Common? Of course, I don't know, what on earth you're driving at—"

"You do!" interrupted Blake.

"Oh, well—just as you like," said Waldo, nodding. "I do! Life's too short to argue. It's a very strange thing, Blake, but you always seem to smell me out. Through long association with Pedro, you are doubtless acquiring some of his noble qualities. But don't take offence—I'm not trying to get your rag out, old man. But I do wish you would let me conduct my own cases in my own way."

"There are certain circumstances connected with this affair—"

"Exactly," murmured Waldo. "Still, I can't help regarding this—er—visit as an unwarrantable intrusion. Hang it, Blake, how would you like me to break into your rooms during your absence?"

"If there were suspicious circumstances concerning me, I don't think I should be entitled to object," retorted Blake. "And in this particular case, Waldo, the circumstances are singularly significant. Don't you think it would be advisable, from every point of view, if you told me of your recent connection with Smiler Dawson, the murderer, and Sir Lionel Bland, of Stowe Lodge, Streatham Common?"

"Marvellous!" said Waldo, with a slightly mocking note in his voice. "You astound me, Blake! How do you know these things?"

"Chuck it, Waldo!" protested Tinker. "There's no need to make the gov'nor ratty. We don't suspect you of anything, but, at the same time, a few

## SEXTON BLAKE on the FILMS

The first two of the series of Sexton Blake 2-reel films, entitled "The Mystery of the Silent Death" and "Silken Threads," are being shown at the following places next week, beginning February 4th:

### "MYSTERY OF THE SILENT DEATH."

Commencing Monday.		Thursday to Saturday.	
<b>PAIGNTON</b>	Picture House	<b>LONDON</b>	Kentish Tn. Cin.
Monday to Wednesday.		<b>HYDE</b>	Hippodrome
<b>BEDFORD</b>	Picturedrome	<b>LEIGH (Lancs.)</b>	Grand
<b>BIRMINGHAM</b>	Metropole	Monday to Saturday.	
<b>WALLASEY</b>	Capitol	<b>CAMBRIDGE</b>	Vic. Kinema
<b>LIVERPOOL</b>	Coliseum Walton	<b>YSTALYFERA</b>	Coliseum
Thursday to Wednesday (Feb. 13th).			
<b>GLENAMAN</b>		Palace	

### "SILKEN THREADS."

Monday to Wednesday.		Thursday to Saturday.	
<b>EASTBOURNE</b>	Picturedrome	<b>TIDWORTH</b>	Hippodrome
<b>MAIDENHEAD</b>	Rialto	<b>EASTBOURNE</b>	Elysium
<b>GRAVESEND</b>	Gem	Monday to Saturday.	
<b>PENZANCE</b>		Royal	
<b>MANCHESTER</b>		Theatre Royal	

The Sexton Blake films will be shown in picture-houses all over the country. WATCH OUT FOR THE NAME OF YOUR TOWN.

N.B.—Copies of the famous Sexton Blake bust may be obtained at most cinemas showing the films, at which application should be made.

words of explanation from you would be more than welcome."

Waldo glanced at his watch.

"Unfortunately, I'm in the very deuce of a hurry," he said regretfully. "Much as I would like to remain here and chat with you two, I must tear myself away. And as I am particularly anxious that you should not follow me, I shall have to adopt rather drastic measures."

With a sudden, lightning-like spring, Waldo hurled himself across the room. The next second he was grasping Blake and Tinker in a vice-like grip.

"When you've finished playing the fool, Waldo, perhaps you'll give me the explanation I've asked you for?" said Blake. "What do you think you're doing, anyway? What's the idea of this nonsense?"

"Whoa! Steady!" gasped Tinker. "You've got a grip like a vice, Waldo!"

"I'd love to stay here and exchange yarns with you," said the Wonder-Man, "but time presses, as the furniture-remover said when the grandfather clock fell on him. This way, gentlemen!"

They were like children in his grip. Tinker wriggled vigorously, but Sexton Blake considered that any such struggle would be undignified. For he knew, at the outset, that he would never be able to break free. Once Waldo gripped a man, there was no possibility of escape until Waldo released that grip. His strength was not natural—it was on the verge of being superhuman.

"I hardly expected this sort of idiocy from you, Waldo," said Blake coldly. "In the old days, perhaps, I should have taken certain measures to safeguard myself, but of late I have grown to regard you as a man of honour."

"That's why it's so hard for me to treat you like this," said Waldo regretfully. "But, as I said before, I'm in a deuce of a hurry. Inside, gentlemen, if you don't mind."

He had touched something with his foot on the wall. And now a section of the panelling slid back, revealing the steel door of a huge safe—or, rather, strong-room.

With a quick movement, Waldo locked his ankle round one of Tinker's legs, and this grip, in itself, was so secure that Tinker had no chance of getting free. With one hand now available, Waldo

operated the strong-room lock and swung the door open.

It was an enormous door, nearly a foot thick, and beyond there was a dark cavity.

"This joke has gone far enough—" began Sexton Blake.

"Wrong!" cut in Waldo. "It has only just started."

With a heave, he flung Blake through the doorway into the darkness. Tinker followed on the instant, and Pedro, who had been leaping up and down, wagging his tail with enjoyment, was pushed through that doorway, too. Pedro, in his innocence, had believed that the whole affair was a new kind of game. And in a way, Pedro's attitude was significant, since it indicated clearly enough that he trusted Waldo implicitly. Indeed, the old dog's affection for the Wonder-Man had done much to prove to Sexton Blake that Waldo was made of the right stuff.

"Hi!" roared Tinker. "Confound you, Waldo! If you think you can play these tricks on us—"

"There are times," said Waldo grimly, "when even my good-humour reaches a limit. For once, Blake, you have made a mistake. This time I am master of the situation. And I am not going to allow any interference, or any interruption, of my affairs."

The door slammed to, with a puff of air squirting from the accurately-fitting jamb. Then followed the creaking of the wards as the lock was operated.

**S**ILENCE—utter, absolute silence!

A minute had passed, and Sexton Blake and Tinker had remained still. Even Pedro felt that it was up to him to

hold his breath. But no sound had come from the other side of that strong-room door. Sexton Blake was intensely exasperated, but never for a moment did he believe that there was any danger.

"He's taking his time, gov'nor," muttered Tinker at last.

"I like Waldo, but now and again he rather gets on my nerves," said Blake. "What reason can he have for this piece of foolery?"

"Waldo doesn't bother about reasons," grunted Tinker. "He'll probably let us out within a couple of minutes."

(Continued on page 16.)

**Huh!**

AND now, of course, the problem is to fill these pages, as the hotel proprietor remarked in a jovial tone to the head-waiter at the bell-boys' tea-party.

**Miaou!**

NOT that it's a problem at all, really. The world wags so briskly and busily nowadays that each dip into the Index brings out another plum for our weekly pic, and I've hardly got well started before the Editor shouts "Whoa!"



And then, of course, there are the first-hand memories of my own (ahem!) eventful life. Did I ever tell you about the twelve collared cats? I happened to be up at Southport a little while ago, and had occasion to accompany an official of the town to the home of a woman who had a sort of cat complex. There were twelve sleek felines on the premises, and each one of them had its own little sleeping cot.

Most of them—the favourites—were wearing white starched polo collars and blue ties.

Yes, life is remarkable!

**A Swop Indicated.**

I SEE there has been a bit of a fuss in the papers recently to the effect that there are no detectives on duty at Scotland Yard during the night hours.

All the C.I.D. men go off duty at eleven p.m., we are told, leaving a clear field for crooks till morning, except, of course, for the attentions of the uniformed men on the beat.

I seem to remember there is a law in France that a "wanted" person cannot be arrested during those same hours—between sunset and sunrise, in fact—so it appears to be a good idea either to shift our men over there or shift their law over here.

**At Dawn.**

A RECENT case of this French law was that of Mme. Hanau, the woman financier who was arrested after a sensational commercial career.

Detectives waited all night in a car outside her house before they could step inside and ask her to come quietly. And immediately the sun rose they rang the bell, entered, and did their stuff. They didn't even let her have her sleep out.

But there, one can forgive anything of men who have waited outside all night.

**My Suspicion.**

BUT as regards the Yard, I must in fairness say I have often phoned up and found old Coutts there during the small hours.

My private suspicion is that the gallant inspector remains there to sleep, on account of the fact that the walls of his house are so thin, and his next-door neighbour snores dreadfully.

**Progress.**

DRIVING about the roads as I do in the Grey Panther, I can't help noticing an increasing tendency towards more and more emphasis in road signs.

Not that they're necessary, I suppose, but if we go on as we are, we shall be in danger of having our roads decorated like those of the States, where they go to almost violent lengths to attract attention.

They have long got past the stage of a notice-board saying: "Drive Slow and See Our City; Drive Fast and See Our Hospital," or even piles of smashed cars by the roadside intimating that that's what happens to speed-hogs.

**Stop—Look—Shudder!**

NOWADAYS they have weird and grotesque wooden figures, built in the most startling shapes they can think of. I have seen many of these, but the limit so far is the eleven-foot skeleton shown in the photo opposite.

I think there is something humorous in inviting the jolly traveller to meditate on death, like those old-time monks who walked about with skulls in their hands. The girls shown in the picture do not seem to be very downcast about it, however.

This type of warning is designed to prevent road accidents. But can you imagine a motorist who has been indulging in bootleg rum, suddenly seeing this fearsome thing in his headlamps' glare?

And, if so, does it?

**A New One.**

THE pedestrian remarked to the motorist with a smile:



DODGE

"Oh, yes, I have my family motto printed in my hat—Hope Brothers."

"Well, there's another one for you," grunted the motorist, pointing to his car. It bore the words: "Dodge Brothers."

**Loss—and Profit.**

I NOTICE an item in the news which states that the new Mme. Tussaud's waxworks has made a profit of £57,813 since its rebuilding after the fire which destroyed the premises.

This proves that its popularity is not on the wane. May the profits continue to wax!

**The Unlucky Thirteen.**

HARKING back to the subject of skeletons, there has been a somewhat romantic, if grisly, find in a village in Switzerland. Thirteen human skeletons have been discovered in a cave.

Local tradition says that they are the remains of a band of brigands who terrorised the district about eighty years ago, but who were driven into hiding and trapped in a cave by a landslide.

The moral seems to be: if you must be a brigand, choose a cave with a back entrance.

Linker's



Sexton discuss—but collect Street-writer c/o Fleetw Street,

**Hogs and Dogs**

BLOODHOUNDS are all well in their way but the latest recruits for tracking

in detective work, the Guv'ner was to ing me, are pigs.

In U.S.A., where one half of the population is engaged in locating secret whisky-manufacturing stills run by the other half, the Dry Agents have found that the surest way to trace illicit distilling is by hogs.

The elusive fumes of a still seem to have an uncanny fascination for the animals, and, left to themselves, they will wander for miles in search of them and ravenously eat the "mash"—a mixture from which the spirit is eventually distilled—when they find it.

A secret whisky-still in Georgia, hidden in dense woods, was located by the aid of pigs after trained Prohibition agents had tried in vain for months to find it.

It occurs to me that Pedro would be very downcast if he knew about this.

**Human Bloodhounds.**

AND, arising out of that, as they said in Parliament, the latest idea for the peace of mind of golfers, who are constantly losing balls sliced off the fairway, is to paint them with a mixture of phosphorus and carbon bisulphide.

When the ball is lost, the golfer need not wait for the caddy to sell it back to him next week as a new one. All he has to do is to sniff the air and wait for a light.

The carbon bisulphide is easily recognised by its smell, and the phosphorus glows in the darkness.

I don't know what carbon bisulphide smells like, but they might be able to locate the ball by its humming, too.

**The Way Out.**

THERE was never a law made yet that couldn't be dodged somehow.

The Powers in Portugal recently decided to eliminate tramps from the national landscape, and passed a law which should have effectually abolished them for ever.

But there was a flaw in it. Portuguese law defines tramps as "barefoot persons," and all the tramps then had to do was to rake about amongst the dustbins for cast-off boots.

Which they did.

tebook

...s assistant cheerily  
...ms from all sources  
...y from that famous  
...own as the Baker  
...ex." If you'd like to  
...ker, his address is:  
... "Union Jack,"  
...house, Farrington  
...on, E.C.4.

**Aftermath.**

JUST lately there has been in London the echo of a crime which began fifty years ago; or, rather, a series of crimes.

It was a meeting at the Institute of Chartered Accountants—a pitiful and pathetic meeting—of a hundred aged men and women, the survivors of 25,000 shareholders in a company formed to have something from the wreck of the various swindling enterprises of the notorious Jabez Balfour.

For year after year the creditors have been meeting like this, hoping against

**More Progress.**

I HAVE just heard of a new machine used by the banks which automatically reveals whether any customer has an overdraft.

This is a mechanical age, and what with adding machines, and cow-milking machines, and automatic photo machines, not to mention a thousand other robots, there soon won't be much left for us humans to do. We are even on the way to getting a mechanical detective! It's this way—

**'Ware Wire!**

IN GERMANY there is a factory which suffered from an incessant pilfering of metal by the workmen, and a consequent loss of a huge sum in the course of a year.

Searching the men at the gates seemed to be useless, so at last somebody devised a gadget whereby, when a man passed through the gates with stolen metal on his person, a gong rang and the game was up.

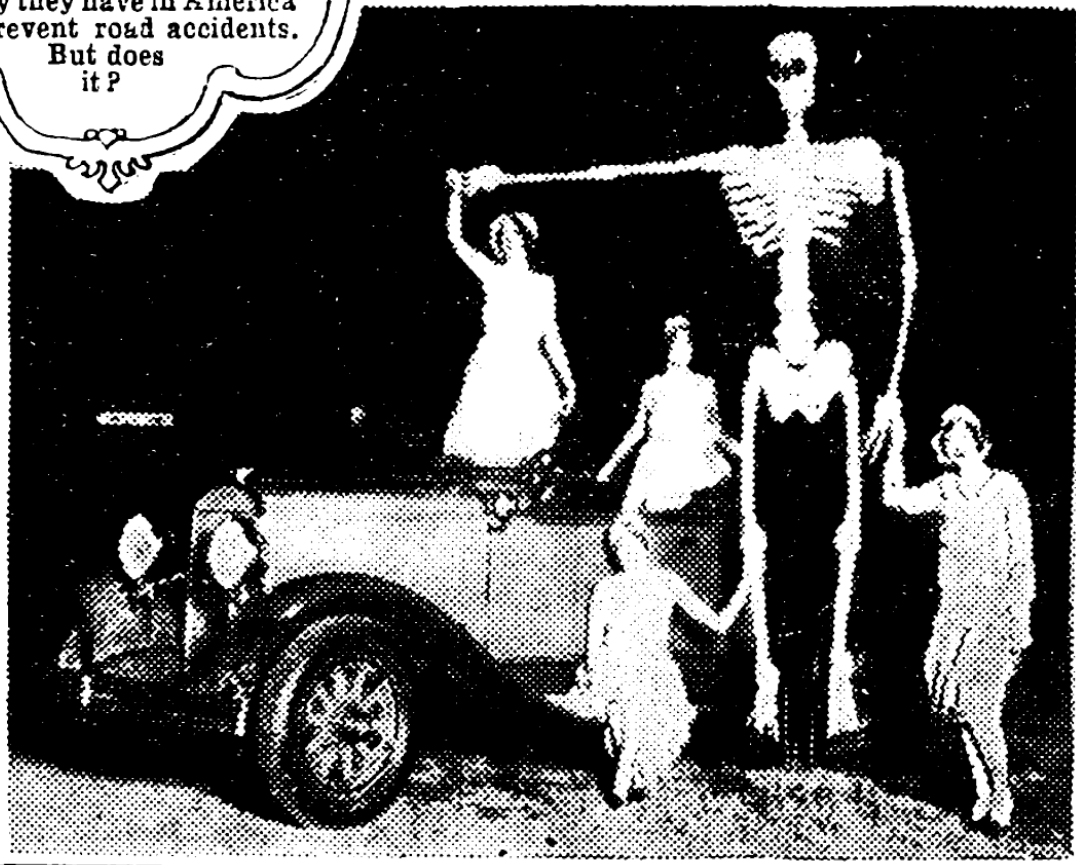
Quite a simple device. The gateposts were wired electrically, and if metal was passed between the wires a current was induced which caused the bell to ring.

Pilfering has now ceased at that factory.



**HUGE SUM**

OUCH! Fancy seeing this grisly thing in the glare of your motor headlamps! It's a way they have in America to prevent road accidents. But does it?



hope that some money would come to them at last out of the wreckage of their little hoards. And each year the answer has been the same—nothing; while each year the numbers have become fewer and fewer.

For thirty-two years these poor folk have hoped to get back a little of their own, but it is doubtful if they ever will.

The arch-swindler Jabez Balfour has long since paid the penalty of his scheming with fourteen years' penal servitude, but the results of his crimes, in the words of the song, "still go marching on."

**His Dividend.**

IT is a well-worn saying that politeness pays. But it does.

For instance—John T. McIntyre. He was a policeman at the Cunard Line piers in New York who was unfailingly polite, and the soft answer is rather a phenomenon in that hectic city. This strange conduct attracted the favourable notice of Mr. J. Leeds as far back as 1924. Mr. Leeds being impressed, and being a millionaire as well, he forthwith treated the polite cop and his wife to a European tour.

John T. has been over here several times since then, and a short time ago

flew across from Paris, and spent seven weeks in this country.

Oh, yes, our policemen are just as polite, but it doesn't pay them so well because we haven't so many millionaires

**Reply in Brief.**

A CORRESPONDENT writes to ask me how to tune a set of jazz instruments.

The answer is that you don't.

**Tell Me a Story.**

NOW let's have a little human-interest story, like those at the pictures, where one little child unites the fond but parted parents.

Baltimore, U.S.A. A drug-store. A determined-looking man enters, and shows the proprietor the muzzle of an automatic pistol. He intimates at the same time that it's a hold-up.

The proprietor's little girl is also behind the counter. Up speaks she in her innocent, childish treble.

"Where did you get that nasty wound on your head, mister?"

Thus appealed to so irresistibly, the bandit proceeds to unfold the story of his life, leading up to the anecdote of the wound. Both of them are quite enthralled.

The proprietor, meantime, has slipped to the door and beckons in a passing cop, and the reminiscent malefactor is led away. Yes, it's all very sad.

**Yoicks.**

THE humdrum duties of our country police don't often include the excitements of the chase.

Man-hunts, maybe, but not fox-hunts, which are usually far more thrilling.

At Broxton, Cheshire, things were proceeding in the peaceful atmosphere of the local police court one morning lately when the clamour of hounds was heard without. The Cheshire Hunt was hot on the scent of a hard-pressed fox.

Straightway all the policemen in the court dashed out and joined in, blowing their whistles like fury.

Oh, no, they hadn't suddenly gone mad and decided to join in. The hounds had merely crossed into an area prohibited on account of foot-and-mouth disease, and the police were whistling to stop the hunt.

The pack, which was in full cry, was called back by the huntsmen; but the fox decided to chance an attack of foot-and-mouth, and kept straight on.

**A Glassy Stare.**

"THE pupils of both eyes failed to react to light, and were dilated."

This evidence was given by a doctor in the West London police court about a man whom he had examined on a charge of driving a car while "under the influence."

He confessed that he did not notice anything peculiar about the eyes, but the man's counsel showed that one of them was a glass eye.

It might have been glass, but it wasn't easily seen through.



(Continued from page 13.)

And Blake, too, was of the same opinion. Waldo had used them thus roughly merely to satisfy a whim of his own. As for leaving them indefinitely in this strong-room, the thought was too preposterous for consideration. Waldo did not do things like that.

But it was confoundedly exasperating, all the same. Single-handed, and with no more effort than if he had been dealing with a couple of infants, Waldo had bundled Blake and Tinker into that huge safe. They had been powerless to resist.

For even if they had struggled with every ounce of their strength, they would never have been able to get free. Waldo's power was uncanny—it was phenomenal. His was the strength of a giant; but he had the supreme advantage of being normally proportioned.

Tinker grunted.

"There's never any telling with Waldo," he said complainingly. "He takes a fit into his head, and this is the result. What on earth are we to do, guv'nor?"

"Nothing," said Blake. "We can do nothing, Tinker, until Waldo is kind enough to unlock the door."

"Ye gods! Just think of it!" said Tinker, breathing hard. "He shoves us in here and locks us in, and doesn't give us a word of explanation. This little inquiry of yours seems to have fizzled out badly."

"How were we to know that Waldo would act with such folly?" said Blake. "I am prepared for almost anything from Waldo, but I will admit that this action of his took me by surprise."

"The trouble is, we couldn't have done anything to avert it," said Tinker. "Struggling was hopeless, and if we had brought out a pair of guns, Waldo would have laughed at them. He's impervious to bullets, unless he's hit in a vital spot—and he knows thundering well that we shouldn't shoot to kill. So what can you do with a fellow like that?"

Blake made no reply. He switched on his electric torch, and examined the interior of that safe. It was not particularly large. There was just comfortable room for the pair of them to stand upright, and it was possible for them to use their elbows. Pedro was standing at Blake's feet, looking considerably bored. Pedro was probably thinking that the whole affair was dull and silly.

"A tomb, Tinker—a living tomb!" said Blake at length. "There is not even a crevice where ventilation can reach us. The air must necessarily become foul sooner or later."

Tinker looked startled.

"But you don't think he has gone, do you, sir?" he asked.

"It looks very much like it," said Blake. "Waldo has locked us in this strong-room, and he has gone off. That's my opinion."

"Yes, but he'll come back within a few minutes," said Tinker. "Hang it, he wouldn't do anything so devilish as that!"

"There have been strange events to-night, young 'un."

"By Jove!" muttered Tinker. "You—you mean, that affair at Streatham? If Waldo did commit those murders it would be a lot safer for him if we were both definitely out of the way."

"I did not exactly mean that, but—"

"Guv'nor!" panted Tinker. "Do you think that Waldo has gone criminal again? My goodness! What a horrible thought! He knows, of course, that you'll inevitably get him for those



murders if he really committed them, so he's making a clean sweep of us—including old Pedro! And we walked right into the trap, too!"

"I don't believe it," said Blake steadily. "Death by suffocation—such as this—is horrifying to contemplate. No; Waldo would never commit such a crime deliberately. But there is another thought in my mind."

"What do you mean, guv'nor?"

"It seems that Waldo has left us here, and that he has gone out," said Blake. "He may intend to come back in time to release us. But in such cases, Tinker, the very best of plans may sometimes go astray. If anything should happen to Waldo—a street accident, for example—we should inevitably perish."

"Yes, if he was prevented from getting back. But he ought not to have gone out, leaving us here, like this!" said Tinker fiercely. "It's too risky, guv'nor! If he wanted to get away from us, and prevent us from following, why couldn't he bind us with ropes, or something like that? But this—"

Tinker clutched at his throat; already he could feel a certain tightening sensation in his lungs. The air in that confined space was becoming vitiated. The oxygen was rapidly being used up, and there was no supply available to renew it.

**S**EXTON BLAKE looked at his watch.

"Half an hour," he murmured, "and nothing has happened! Will he come back, Tinker?"

"He must—he must!" said Tinker

desperately. "But are we to rely on him? Can't we do something ourselves, guv'nor?"

"Surely Tinker, you must realise the hopelessness of our position?" said Blake quietly. "What can we do?"

He flashed the light of his torch on the smooth walls of the strong-room. They were of steel. There was no crevice—not even a tiny crack. The door, in closing, had had the effect of hermetically sealing that confined prison.

"Let's hammer on the door!" panted Tinker. "Come on, guv'nor! Anything is better than standing here like this, just waiting for death!"

Tinker pulled a heavy pocket-knife out, and commenced battering frantically on the steelwork of the door. In that tiny space the noise was deafening. Pedro, to make matters worse, was so startled that he started barking furiously.

"Stop it, Tinker!" said Sexton Blake sharply.

"Eh? But—"

"Use your common sense," interrupted Blake. "In here, the noise may be deafening, but outside, in Waldo's study, it is merely a dull thudding. And beyond the main door of the flat nothing whatever can be heard. So you are merely using up your energy for no purpose, Tinker. I'm surprised at you for getting into a panic like this!"

Tinker, sobered, put his pocket-knife away.

"Sorry, guv'nor!" he muttered. "I—I suppose it is silly, isn't it?"

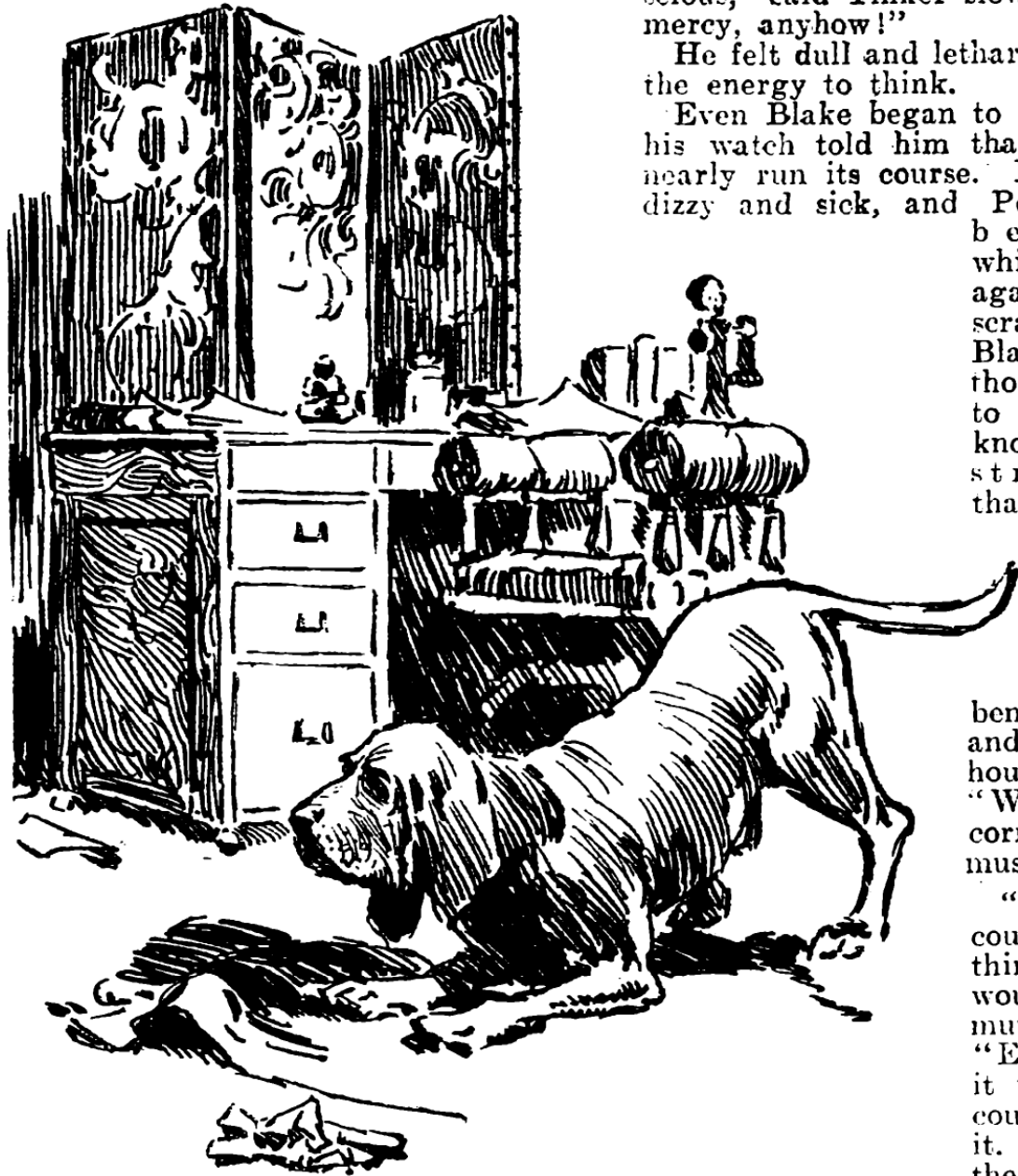
He fell silent, breathing hard. The air, already foul, was difficult to



hale; it caused a strange giddiness. Blake and Tinker were feeling the effects curiously now. Pedro did not seem to be his usual alert self, either.

And there was the growing horror of the situation.

The uncertainty—the suspense. Would Waldo come back in time? Or had he deliberately left them to die?



During his former criminal career the Wonder-Man had always been ruthless and relentless. At the same time he had never deliberately committed a murder—he had never indulged in such a cold-blooded atrocity as this.

But what if the circumstances were exceptional? What if he had really murdered Sir Lionel Bland—perhaps in a moment of uncontrollable anger? What then? Wasn't it probable that he would throw all his principles overboard, and get rid of Sexton Blake by the easiest possible method?

Blake felt himself growing cold as he thought of the possibilities. With Rupert Waldo there was always an element of uncertainty; one could never tell how he was going to act. In his favour there was the definite fact that he had never—to Blake's knowledge—committed any brutal crime. He had always been amazingly clever, and he had been guilty of fraud, robbery, and even forgery. Furthermore, he had taken a delight in fooling the police, and in playing tricks upon Blake.

And in the majority of his criminal exploits it generally turned out that he robbed the people who were, in themselves, scoundrels who could not be touched by the law. And in very many instances Waldo had embarked on a perilous undertaking for the sake of another—and for the mere joy of the adventure.

And nowadays he was supposedly going straight, working enthusiastically in his new profession. As a "Peril Expert" he had had many cases, and success had crowned his efforts.

Why, then, should he revert to criminal ways?

"No, Tinker, I won't believe that Waldo has left us here to die," said Sexton Blake. "He'll come back—and in time."

"The air's getting pretty foggy now," muttered Tinker.

"Yes, it is bad," agreed Blake. "Another half hour, perhaps, and it'll be too bad."

"Before then we shall be unconscious," said Tinker slowly. "That's a mercy, anyhow!"

He felt dull and lethargic, not having the energy to think.

Even Blake began to lose hope when his watch told him that an hour had nearly run its course. He was feeling dizzy and sick, and Pedro now was

beginning to whine. Now and again he would scratch at Sexton Blake's foot, as though appealing to his master to know what the strange feeling that had come over him could mean.

"All right, Pedro," murmured

Blake, bending down and patting the hound's sleek coat. "We're in a tight corner, but we mustn't despair."

"If only we could do something, gov'nor, it would be better," muttered Tinker. "Even if we knew it would fail, we could still go at it. I mean, there'd be something to do. But

**"This joke has gone far enough!" began Blake. "Wrong—it's only just started!" cut in Waldo. With a heave, he flung Blake and Tinker into the doorway of the dark vault.**

to stand here like this, getting weaker and weaker, and fighting for breath, and doing—"

There came a sudden loud click, and without a sound from outside the door of the strong-room slowly opened.

**B**LAKE and Tinker fairly reeled out, and they breathed in great gulps of the pure air. Pedro flopped down on the floor just outside the strong-room door, and Tinker managed to reach the easy-chair. Blake stood by the table, rapidly recovering. His giddiness was going, and his brain was clearing.

In that first moment he had looked round sharply, but he and Tinker and Pedro were alone in the room. It occurred to Blake, then, that Waldo must have opened the door and then silently fled. Perhaps he was in the adjoining room even now, chuckling to himself over the fright he had given.

"Upon my word!" said Blake grimly. He had just caught sight of a big sheet of notepaper which was propped up on the desk. There were some words scrawled upon it:

"Awfully sorry, old things, but I needed an hour to myself. That strong-room lock is a patent of my own, and

there's a gadget connected with it which automatically opens the door at any given time. You would have been safe in there for a couple of hours, but I didn't want to run it too fine. Awfully sorry if I have put the wind up you, but, as you know, I wouldn't harm you for worlds.—R. W."

"What is it?" asked Tinker, rising unsteadily from the chair.

"Read it," said Blake, tossing it over.

He walked to the strong-room door and examined it. So Waldo had been gone for over an hour! A cunning trick—a shrewd dodge. He had gained a clear hour's start.

## CHAPTER 6. On Waldo's Trail!

**W**ITHIN five minutes both Sexton Blake and Tinker were themselves again. And they were more than a little exasperated by the trick that Waldo had played upon them. At the same time, they could hardly help being relieved.

"I knew from the start that Waldo wasn't serious, gov'nor," said Tinker. "He's not built like that. He couldn't murder us in cold blood—"

"Nevertheless, I intend to make him pay for this ridiculous practical joking," said Blake curtly. "Confound him! There is not one chance in a thousand that we shall get on his track now."

"Not one in ten thousand, gov'nor," agreed Tinker. "But, by Jove, you must admit that this whole game is characteristic of Waldo's whimsical ways. And if he thought there was any chance of us getting on his trail he wouldn't have allowed us to escape after the hour. I mean, what can we do?"

"Before we can solve the mystery of those shrivelled men, Tinker, we must get hold of Waldo," said Blake. "Without question, Waldo can provide us with the answer to the riddle."

"You're not thinking of putting Pedro on the trail, are you, gov'nor?"

"Yes."  
"But it'll be no good," protested Tinker. "The chances are that Waldo went off by car somewhere. Besides, he's no fool. If he did leave a trail he would leave one especially for us—so as to lead us into a mare's nest or something like that. You know him, gov'nor!"

"Nevertheless, we must put Pedro on the trail," said Blake. "Even Waldo is not infallible, and, although the trail may lead nowhere in particular, there is always the chance that we shall pick up a stray clue."

They made a quick search of the flat to assure themselves that Rupert Waldo was not really there, and then they set out. Blake knew that it was useless to look through any of Waldo's papers or personal property—besides which, Blake knew that he had no justification for such a liberty.

He had taken one of Waldo's caps from the little lobby, and Pedro, having taken a good long sniff at this, made short-work of getting on the trail. In fact, the trail was so hot that both Blake and Tinker were suspicious of its authenticity.

Pedro led the way straight down from the Strand to the Embankment, going by way of Villiers Street.

Once on the Embankment, Pedro crossed the tramlines, reached the pavement, and continued along, next to the river. He was making for the direction of Westminster Bridge.

"Something squiffy about this," said Tinker. "In my opinion, Waldo left this scent on purpose—knowing very well that we should put Pedro on the trail. We shall come to a dead end presently."

The prediction proved only too accurate. For, after a while, Pedro led the way through a break in the parapet, and went down some stone steps. Then he came to a halt, for there was nothing below him but water—the cold, black waters of the Thames.

Tinker grunted.

"What did I tell you, guv'nor?" he asked. "Waldo has fooled us again! He's done this deliberately. It's just another of his stunts! Trying to make us believe that he's committed suicide, I suppose!"

"It's far more likely that he had a boat waiting here," said Blake, frowning. "In that case, he wouldn't care whether we trailed him or not."

"Well, he's gone, anyway," said Tinker. "What difference does it make?"

He looked round. The river was dark, and there were many lights twinkling on the South side. Although it was now early morning, dawn was only just about due, and the sky was overcast with heavy, scurrying clouds.

"Now then! What do you think you're doing there?"

It was a sharp, stern voice, and when Blake and Tinker turned they found a police constable eyeing them with suspicion and disfavour.

"Awfully sorry, constable, but I did not know that we were transgressing the law," said Blake mildly.

"That's all very well!" said the policeman. "What are you doing here with that dog? I've had enough trouble with people trying to drown their dogs—"

He broke off, giving a kind of gulp.

"Why, it's Mr. Blake!" he ejaculated. "Mr. Tinker, too!" He saluted stiffly. "Begging your pardon, sir, but I didn't recognise you at first," he added. "Thought you were some fellows trying to drown a dog!"

"I don't think we'll drown old Pedro just yet," said Tinker, with a grin.

"I wondered what you was doing on these steps, sir!" said the constable, looking at Blake. "Not wanting to see Dr. Leighton, was you?"

Sexton Blake slapped his thigh.

"Dr. Leighton!" he ejaculated. "Of course! I was wondering what the difference could be. The Thames looks unfamiliar without the doctor's yacht at its moorings."

Tinker looked round at the river, and he, too, noticed that there was a sort of blank space. He had not observed this in the gloom, earlier.

To any casual passer-by, of course, there was nothing whatever remarkable in the appearance of the Thames. But Blake and Tinker had grown accustomed to seeing Dr. Christopher Leighton's motor-yacht at its moorings, on this particular spot. Month in, month out, the yacht had always been there—until, indeed, it had become a part of the landscape. Just as one notices, on entering a familiar room, that a small article of furniture is missing, so Blake and Tinker now realised the cause of their recent vague uncertainty.

"So the doctor has moved on at last, eh?" said Blake, looking at the con-

stable. "That's something new, isn't it?"

"When I saw the old boat going, I fair rubbed my eyes, sir," said the constable nodding. "First time she's shifted for nigh on three years—although, at one time of day, the doctor used to go for regular cruises down the estuary. I suppose he's getting more quiet in his habits nowadays."

"But he seems to have had a relapse to-night," remarked Tinker.

"You're right, youngster!" said the policeman. "A queer time to shift, I must say. Particularly as he's only gone about a mile down the river."

"Is that all?" said Blake.

"That's all, sir! Went down about an hour ago, roughly!"

"How do you know she's so near?"

"Well, my beat takes me down that way, sir," said the constable, with a jerk of his head. "I thought the old boat was well off down the river—until I saw her, again, moored about a mile down. But there! Dr. Leighton was always a queer sort—not that he ain't one of the best."

Blake nodded.

"Well, Tinker, we'll be getting along," he said.

The constable saluted, they bade him "good-morning!" and walked away.

"There's nothing in it, is there, guv'nor?" asked Tinker.

"Nothing in what?"

"That yacht moving down the river during the night," said Tinker. "It's not in any way connected with Waldo, is it?"

"I think it is not merely connected with Waldo, but with the Streatham affair, too," said Sexton Blake grimly. "There is our connecting link, Tinker, unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Well, I'm hanged if I can see it."

"Waldo, too, thought that we should be baffled," said Blake. "He probably does not know that I am well acquainted with Dr. Christopher Leighton, and that the motor-yacht has been a familiar sight on the river for long months. And Waldo naturally assumed that when we found the trail leading to those steps we should give it up. But we're not going to give it up, Tinker. We're going to Dr. Leighton's yacht."

"You think Waldo's on board, guv'nor?"

"I know he is."

"But why?" asked Tinker staring. "Why are you so certain?"

He could not see the connection. He knew that Blake was acquainted with Dr. Christopher Leighton, and he knew that this latter gentleman was a very clever scientist—a bachelor and a wealthy man. For many years the doctor had lived on this yacht. He was more or less a recluse, and this vessel was his only home. There are, as a matter of fact, many people who spend a large proportion of their lives on board such vessels, moored in the Thames. Perhaps the fact that they are free of rates and taxes may be some inducement to adopt this type of abode.

"I can understand your assuming that Waldo has gone on board the yacht, and that he has induced Dr. Leighton to shift a mile downstream," said Tinker. "But I'm jiggered if I can find out where you get the connec-

tion between Dr. Leighton and that rummy business at Stowe Lodge."

"There is something you don't know, Tinker," replied Blake. "After you had gone from Stowe Lodge, Lennard and I had a look through Sir Lionel's diary. We found many references to a mysterious 'Dr. L.'"

"By jingo!"

"I don't suppose I should ever have connected Dr. Leighton with this 'Dr. L.," went on Blake. "There must be many thousands of doctors in the country whose name begins with the letter 'L.' But when we trace Waldo to this particular spot, and when we realise that Waldo is definitely associated with the Streatham affair, Dr. Leighton's connection with Sir Lionel Bland becomes obvious. I don't think there can be any question that he is the 'D. L.' of Sir Lionel's diary."

"Well, of course, now I understand," said Tinker. "Hang it, you can't expect me to jump to these conclusions when I'm in the dark! I didn't know that you'd been nosing into Sir Lionel's diary."

"That's hardly a nice word, Tinker." "Well, you know what I mean, guv'nor," grinned Tinker. "Of course, looking through the dead man's diary was necessary—"

"It was Lennard's idea—not mine," smiled Blake. "But that is neither here nor there. Having made this unexpected discovery, we must obviously interview Dr. Leighton without delay—and there can be little doubt that we shall find Waldo on board. The next hour promises to be interesting, young 'un."

"Well, I hope we shall pick up a few threads," said Tinker. "At present the whole affair remains as puzzling and as baffling as ever."

**D**R. CHRISTOPHER LEIGHTON'S yacht was quite a big, comfortable-looking craft. She was moored alongside a jetty, and her deck was dark and empty when Sexton Blake and Tinker arrived on the scene. They went straight on board, Pedro following them.

Blake, who had spent many a quiet hour with Dr. Leighton down in his cosy saloon, knew his way about. He reached the companion, slid back the scuttle, and looked down. A light was gleaming from the saloon, and there was, too, a slight haze of tobacco smoke.

Sexton Blake did not hesitate.

He walked down the companion, and Tinker followed. At the foot of the narrow stairs Blake turned, and found himself within the low-ceilinged, well-lighted saloon. And Blake, accustomed as he was to repressing his feelings, could not help giving a little jump of amazement.

For there, standing in the cabin, a yard or two away from him, was—Sir Lionel Bland!

## CHAPTER 7.

### Waldo Amuses Himself!

**S**EXTON BLAKE was exceedingly startled.

There could be no mistake about this.

The man standing in front of him was clean-shaven, and he had well-brushed grey hair. He was not wearing an atom of disguise—and he was exactly the same as the man Blake had seen on the library floor at Stowe Lodge. In spite of the battered state



"... he had a boat waiting here."

of that poor body, Blake instantly recognised the same features in this man who now stood on the yacht. And, vaguely, he saw another resemblance—and a flash of the truth came into his mind. And this, in itself, was startling enough.

From the very first moment that Sexton Blake had set eyes on that body in the library at Stowe Lodge, he had been aware of something elusively familiar. And now, abruptly, he knew exactly what it was that had so subconsciously impressed him.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the man in the saloon, his voice hoarse and startled. "What are you doing here?"

As Blake was about to reply, the yacht throbbed perceptibly, and there came a sudden jerk. It was so violent that Blake was nearly thrown from his feet.

And then came something else.

"Here, what the— Let go!" yelled Tinker, on the upper steps of the companion. "What do you think you're doing? Let go—"

He broke off, and the deep baying of Pedro's voice sounded. Then came a loud splash, intermingled with a startled gurgle. Pedro barked again, and a smaller splash took place.

"Tinker!" shouted Blake, turning swiftly.

He ran up the companion, arrived on deck, and Rupert Waldo faced him.

"What have you done, Waldo?" demanded Blake sharply.

"Pitched Tinker overboard. And I'm going to pitch you overboard next!" replied Waldo promptly. "You're too confoundedly energetic for my liking. I don't want any interference just now, Blake. Sorry, and all that, but I've got to insist."

And, without giving Blake any chance to reply, Waldo seized him, gave him a violent push, and pitched him clean overboard into the river. The motor-yacht was moving fairly quickly now, and making off down-stream.

"It's all right; you'll only get a wetting!" yelled Waldo cheerfully. "I know you're both good swimmers, and you'll soon get ashore. I'll probably see you some other time."

Sexton Blake was furious.

He had had no chance of putting up a fight; and, even if he had had this chance, his position would have been hopeless. For Waldo had been known to fight against a dozen men, and to beat them. His strength and agility were things to marvel at.

When Blake had shaken the water out of his eyes, and when he looked round, he found the yacht speeding down-stream at ever-increasing velocity. She was evidently a fast boat. And Tinker was just swimming up, with Pedro keeping well beside him.

"He's dished us this time, gov'nor!" gurgled Tinker.

"Has he?" snapped Blake. "Waldo is an optimist if he thinks that he can escape me in this crude fashion! Confound his impudence! There was utterly no necessity for him to play this trick."

"Well, he's got rid of us, anyhow, gov'nor."

"But he did not prevent me from seeing Sir Lionel Bland on that yacht." Tinker nearly sank in his astonishment.

"Sir Lionel Bland?" he spluttered. "But he's dead!"

"He's very much alive—and he's with Waldo!" said Blake.

"Sir Lionel Bland alive!" gasped Tinker. "You—you must be mad, gov'nor! We saw him, dead, on the library floor at Stowe Lodge!"

"We saw somebody else, but not Sir Lionel Bland," replied Blake.

"What about Pringle, then? Are you suggesting that Pringle deliberately fooled us?"

"Pringle himself was fooled," said Blake, as he swam strongly. "Pringle thought that the body was that of his own master. I'm beginning to get a hang of this case now, Tinker."

"Well, it's more than I am," said Tinker grumpily. "We've had nothing but trouble ever since we started! First we get bottled up in a strong-room and think we're going to get suffocated. And now we're chucked into the Thames. When I see Waldo again I'll give him a piece of my mind!"

"Don't be so rash, Tinker—you need it all for yourself," retorted Blake. "Hallo! What's this? By Jove! I wonder— Quick, Tinker, this way!"

They had been making for the south side of the river, for the current was causing them to drift in this direction, and the swimming was easier. The grey light of dawn was in the sky, and London was now definitely awake for the day.

But nobody had apparently noticed those swimming figures in the river, for there was no outcry from either shore. The little incident had happened without causing any stir.

Waldo had been right in assuming that Blake and Tinker could easily swim ashore. The water was icily cold, and they were wearing their clothing; yet they were capable enough of this short effort. And Pedro, of course, was a cert.

But now Blake changed his direction. He had caught sight of a small outboard motor-boat, one of the latest type. It was moored quite near the embankment, and was deserted.

"Aboard with you, Tinker!" said Blake grimly. "Luck is with us! If there is petrol in this tank we might still be able to overtake that rascal Waldo."

"But he's gone; he's escaped by now."

"It is almost certain that he will run straight down the river and keep going for miles," said Blake. "He does not anticipate that we might meet with such a stroke of luck as this. An outboard motor-boat, Tinker. I think you know how they can shift."

"Yes, rather!" said Tinker eagerly.

They managed to scramble aboard, although they nearly upset the frail craft in doing so. And it took Sexton Blake only a few moments to ascertain that there was a plentiful supply of petrol in the little tank. The engine at the rear, looking rather clumsy as it overhung the stern, responded very quickly to Blake's expert handling.

There was a sudden roar, a splutter, another roar, and then the engine settled down to a steady hum.

"**W**HEW!" gasped Tinker, his teeth chattering. "If we escape pneumonia, gov'nor, we shall be lucky!"

The outboard craft was simply shooting down the river, leaving a wake of creamy-brown foam behind her. Blake, crouching at the controls,

did not speak. He knew perfectly well that there were risks attached to this chase.

Both he and Tinker had come straight out of the water, and Pedro, of course, had been dragged on board. The exposure occasioned by this trip might easily prove serious, unless very prompt measures were taken at the end of the chase.

But this was no time to consider such matters.

There was a strong possibility of overtaking the motor-yacht, and Blake was not going to allow the opportunity to slip. This outboard motor-boat was the very thing needed, for it was capable of at least double the speed of the yacht.

And as very little time had been lost at the outset, the yacht was soon overtaken. In the dim grey light Blake and

Tinker caught sight of her tearing down the river, leaving a lot of foam behind. But she seemed to be merely crawling, compared with the startling speed that was attained by the pursuing boat.

Waldo, who was at the yacht's wheel, projected his lower jaw with vexation as he realised what had happened. And very soon he recognised the figures of Blake and Tinker. He shook his fist at them defiantly.

And then the little outboard craft came shooting alongside, Blake steering her perilously close to the big motor-yacht.

"Pull up, Waldo!" shouted Blake.

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" roared Waldo. "What do you think you can do, anyhow? If you like to run alongside, all well and good!"

"Unless you heave-to at once I'll signal to the River Police launch!" retorted Blake grimly. "That's not merely a threat, Waldo; I mean it! Are you going to stop, or shall I signal to the police?"

"A fat lot I care about the police!" said Waldo contemptuously.

"Sir Lionel might not have the same opinion," retorted Blake. "You'd better make up your mind quickly, Waldo! There's a police launch—"

"All right—all right!" sang out the Wonder-Man. "Hang it all, Blake, you're an infernal nuisance at times, you know—although I admire you tremendously for your tenacity. I suppose I'd better give in."

"No tricks, mind!" yelled Tinker.

"All right, old son; we've had enough tricks for one night!" grinned Waldo.

He edged in towards the side of the river, and the motor-yacht slowed down, and finally came to a standstill; and Waldo lowered an anchor, since there was no mooring-buoy handy. He might get into trouble later on, but he didn't care.

Blake, edging the outboard motor-boat alongside, climbed on board, and Waldo regarded him with some concern. In fact, both Blake and Tinker were blue with the cold.

"You'd better come below—quick!" said Waldo. "Strip those things off, and we'll roll you into some dry blankets. I don't think you'll come to much harm."

"It's a good thing we weren't drowned!" growled Tinker, his teeth chattering.

"Cheese it!" protested Waldo. "I



... overtaking the motor yacht.

know that you are both good swimmers. But, still, on the whole, perhaps it's better that you should know the whole truth, Blake. You'll never be satisfied until you get it."

"I shan't!" said Blake abruptly.

"But don't forget that Sir Lionel Bland is my client—and I don't want any poachers!" said Waldo calmly. "You seemed to be messing up all my plans, so I took these measures to choke you off. I might as well have tried to stop a thunderstorm. You're an awful beggar, Blake, for sticking to a fellow!"

TEN minutes later, Sexton Blake and Tinker were well wrapped up in blankets, and comfortably seated on the wide lounge, down in the yacht's saloon. Pedro was sprawled in front of the fire, and Waldo was sitting on a corner of the table. Sir Lionel Bland, agitated, pale, and shaky, was in the easy chair.

"This gentleman is Mr. Sexton Blake," Waldo was saying. "You needn't be afraid of him, Sir Lionel. I've known him for years, and I can guarantee him. He's harmless enough if you stroke him the right way—and he's warranted not to bite."

"Mr. Blake, I hardly know what to say," muttered Sir Lionel Bland huskily. "You must think that I am a dreadful criminal—"

"I am keeping my mind perfectly open," interrupted Blake. "But the events of the night have certainly been very unusual—to put it mildly—and I shall be glad enough of a full explanation. I have no doubt that Waldo can supply most of the facts I need."

"He's an extraordinary man, Mr. Blake," said Sir Lionel, looking at Waldo with a kind of awe. "Frankly, I have been rushed off my feet. During these past hectic hours I have not known whether I was on my head or my heels. This—this strange man has taken complete possession of me, and I have been like putty in his fingers."

"There's a tip for you, Blake," said Waldo, grinning. "Always treat your clients like putty. The only way to go ahead with a case is to get a good half-nelson on your client, and then proceed to shift him about as the fancy takes you. But there, your methods may be different from mine."

"I am glad to say they are," replied Blake. "And when you've quite finished fooling about, Waldo, I shall be glad of that explanation."

"Well, to begin with, you already know that this poor gentleman is Sir Lionel Bland," said Waldo. "The other one—the poor chap on the library floor at Stowe Lodge—"

"Was Dr. Christopher Leighton," said Sexton Blake quietly.

"You know, then?" ejaculated Sir Lionel, startled.

"I did not know at the time—but I have put two and two together since," said Blake. "I may as well tell you that I was acquainted with Dr. Leighton—although, when I saw his body at Stowe Lodge, I failed to recognise him."

"That's not very surprising, considering his injuries—and some other things, which you will hear about in due course," said Waldo. "Well, I'd better begin at the beginning. Sure you're quite comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you."

"How about a cigarette?"

"I do not require a cigarette now," said Blake.

"Really, Mr. Blake, I must apologise for this—this man's extraordinary manner," said Sir Lionel, looking

worried. "He is quite incorrigible. From the first moment of my acquaintance with him, I have been bewildered and dizzy."

Rupert Waldo chuckled.

"It's hardly fair to blame me entirely," he said. "Certain other events to-night have put you off your stroke, Sir Lionel. You've got to admit it."

"I do, but, at the same time, your own personality has rather overwhelmed me."

"Well, the whole thing started some time after midnight, on Streatham Common," said Waldo, becoming serious. "I had been on a case at Streatham—quite a professional affair, you know—and I was rather late. I was walking across the common, on the way to the high road, thinking that I might be able to obtain a taxi. So I was a bit startled when I found a man in the road, dying."

"Smiler Dawson!" murmured Tinker.

"Exactly—Smiler Dawson," agreed Waldo. "He told me his name, and frankly admitted that he was a burglar. Afraid he was all smashed up inside, and I could quite credit that statement, because when I half lifted him I could feel the poor beggar's ribs grating together. It was an ugly enough sound."

"Did he say how he came by these dreadful injuries?" asked Blake keenly.

"He told me that he had just left Sir Lionel Bland's house, and he even pushed some currency notes into my hand," said Waldo. "He told me that the job was a failure—that he had been led to believe that Sir Lionel's safe contained a whole bunch of diamonds, but that he had found nothing except a few notes. He also said that Sir Lionel had surprised him at the safe, and that he had bolted in fright."

"Dropping his bag of tools on the veranda," nodded Blake, "and gashing him arm rather badly at the same time."

"He didn't mention those details, but I'll take your word for them," said Waldo. "He jumped on his motor-bike—"

"What!" yelled Tinker.

"Hush, young 'un," said Blake. "We are now beginning to understand—"

"Motor-bike!" ejaculated Tinker excitedly. "Then that explains it! If we had known about a motor-bike earlier, we should have jumped to the truth. But we didn't even guess that there had been an accident."

"Even I knew nothing of any motorcycle," said Sir Lionel, looking surprised. "You did not explain this to me earlier, Mr. Waldo."

"There wasn't the time—or the need," said Waldo. "Well, let me get on. I want to prove to you, Blake, that there's been no murder in this affair. And my own part in the game is absolutely innocent—I am simply working for my client, and plying my trade as a Peril Expert. Goodness knows, there's been plenty of peril."

"Did Dawson explain the accident, and what had happened to his machine?" asked Blake.

"He just told me that he had leapt upon his machine, and had driven off without troubling to switch on the headlamp," replied Waldo. "As you can imagine, he was in a bit of a flurry—knowing, of course, that Sir Lionel was on his track. Well, it was blowing like the deuce, and before Dawson could realise it, he had crashed head-on into a man who was walking in the middle of the road—with his head down against the wind."

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake.

"Dr. Leighton!"

"Of course," said Waldo, nodding. "Dr. Leighton. Dawson apparently be-

lieved that Dr. Leighton had hardly been injured, for he picked himself up and walked away, evidently only bruised. But Dawson himself was flung off his machine with terrific violence, and most of his ribs were broken by coming into terrific contact with the sharp edge of the kerbstone."

"Poor beggar!" said Blake feelingly.

"He knew he was dying, and he asked me to take the currency notes back to Sir Lionel, and explain things. And before I could give him any promise or anything like that he died in my arms."

Waldo paused, grave and troubled.

"Naturally, I was rather bowled over," he continued, after a short spell. "And then came a really staggering event. I seemed to feel a sort of movement in that dead body, and it gave me a start. And then, when I looked at it, I found that the body had shrivelled up!"

"But why?" asked Blake. "What caused it to—"

"I was the cause," replied Waldo quietly.

"You!"

"Unconsciously—yes," said Waldo. "I realised it in a flash. I knew that I had brought on this extraordinary effect. And, I can tell you, I was clean knocked over. I dropped that body in horror, and stared down at it as guiltily as if I had caused the man's death. Yet, as I have told you, he died in my arms—purely as a result of the accident."

"I believe you, Waldo," said Blake, nodding. "But what explanation can you give of the shrivelling?"

"Although I know how it was caused, I cannot give you any satisfactory explanation," said Waldo quietly. "I only know that the thing happened, and that I caused it. But why it should shrivel up like that is quite beyond my comprehension. I can only suggest one possible solution."

"And that?"

"For some weeks I have been experimenting with high-power electricity," said Waldo slowly. "No; don't think that I'm anticipating any return to criminal ways. Nothing of the sort. It was just a hobby of mine—a mere whim."

"We saw the gadgets in your chambers," said Tinker.

"Yes," said Waldo. "Electro magnets, dynamos, generators—all sorts of contrivances. My idea was to charge myself with radio energy. I thought it might be useful."

"You once charged yourself with high power electricity, did you not?" asked Blake. "I remember the time, Waldo. You gave me quite a shock—a literal shock—when I touched you. You were capable of radiating sparks from your very finger-tips."

"But this was different," said Waldo. "Something quite new. In fact, I am reluctant to give you the details, because the idea is—well, private—and one day I may succeed in my experiments. But so far I have failed."

"But how does this affect the shrivelling of Dawson?" asked Tinker.

"Very materially," said Waldo. "Although I didn't succeed in charging myself with radio energy, I must have charged myself with something—some sort of electrical force. But even I can't explain the quality of it. All the same, it must have been this force which expended itself on the dead tissue in my arms. While the man was alive there was no effect. Anyhow, there it is, and I can't explain."

"There are many things connected with electricity that we cannot explain," said Blake, nodding. "We have, at least, a partial explanation of the



curious mammifying effect, and I suppose we must be satisfied with it."

"I left the body there, just as it was," said Waldo. "As for the motor-cycle, I did not even look for it. I tell you, I was startled—I was more worried about that shrivelling business than about the man's death. Anyhow, I went to Sir Lionel Bland's house, and I would have approached the front door in the ordinary way, only I saw that some french windows were open along the side of the house. I went to them."

"And you found—what?"

"I found Sir Lionel Bland half mad with distraction," replied Waldo. "And I found Dr. Christopher Leighton stretched on the floor—dead."

## CHAPTER 8. Explanations.

**S**IR LIONEL BLAND, pale and agitated, sat forward in his chair.

"I really think, Mr. Waldo, that I had better continue the story from this point," he said huskily. "Mr. Blake, I know that appearances are very much against me. I realise now that I was a fool to take any notice of this man's persuasive tongue. My plain duty was to face the music like a man—more particularly as I had done no wrong."

"Well, I don't agree," said Waldo. "Even now you may find yourself in a hopeless mess, Sir Lionel. I'm hoping that Mr. Blake will agree to keep mum; in my opinion, it's the only satisfactory solution. That's why I've told him the truth."

"It is not fair that we should pledge Mr. Blake to secrecy," said Sir Lionel.

"I do not pledge myself to secrecy," put in Sexton Blake. "I gave no such

**"He's an extraordinary man, Mr. Blake" said Sir Lionel, looking at Waldo with a kind of awe. "He—he has taken complete possession of me. I have been like putty in his fingers."**

guarantee when I consented to hear this story."

"All right," said Waldo, in his cool way. "I know that we can rely upon your judgment, Blake. When you've heard everything, you can do as you please. Well, as I was saying, I found Sir Lionel nearly crazy with worry, and Dr. Leighton was on the floor, dead. The safe was standing open, and I tossed the notes that Dawson had given me into it, and forgot all about them."

"Let me give you my own version of the affair, Mr. Blake," said Sir Lionel earnestly. "But, beforehand, I had better tell you of my association with Dr. Leighton. It dates back for many years—fifteen or sixteen years, in fact. He and I were the very firmest of friends, and, indeed, I know for a fact that Dr. Leighton made his will very largely in my favour."

"Oh, indeed!" said Blake.

"A suspicious circumstance, eh?" said the other bitterly. "A good reason for my murdering him, you're thinking. But let me give you a few intimate details."

"When I first met Dr. Leighton, many years ago, I was exceedingly angry. On quite six occasions I had seen snapshots of myself in the illustrated papers, and in every case the name of Dr. Christopher Leighton was given instead of my own. And in some instances I came across snapshots of Dr. Leighton

with my own name beneath. Furthermore, I was continually being accosted by perfect strangers—even slapped on the back and greeted with such-like familiarity."

"Dr. Leighton was very much like you, Sir Lionel."

"The likeness was startling," agreed Sir Lionel Bland. "Side by side, perhaps, a considerable difference would have been noted. But, superficially, we were very similar in appearance. The same build, the same coloured hair—and both clean-shaven. At that time, I had better explain. Dr. Leighton was very irresponsible—very frivolous, too. He was always getting into the most questionable scrapes, and you can judge of my annoyance when I found that I was associated with these—well, unpleasant incidents."

"Yes, I'm afraid that Dr. Leighton was rather a blade in his younger days," said Blake, nodding.

"Well, one day I considered that there had been enough of this sort of thing," said Sir Lionel. "I went to Dr. Leighton's rooms and told him frankly that something would have to be done. Either he must grow a moustache, or I must. Anyhow, that one of us must do something definitely to alter his appearance. We were both more or less public men, and the confusion over us was becoming exasperating and embarrassing. Strangely enough, in spite of his reputation I liked him from the first."

"He was, indeed, a very likeable fellow," said Blake. "I am exceedingly sorry that he has met with such a tragic end."

"After one or two meetings we fixed the thing up," continued Sir Lionel reminiscently. "It was agreed that he should grow a straggly beard and moustache, and that he should allow his hair to grow long. This was accomplished in about three months, and the change was remarkable. From that

day, indeed, there was never again any confusion between us—since the doctor's beard and moustache and his long hair rendered him totally different in appearance from me."

"And your friendship was maintained?"

"It was strengthened, year by year," said Sir Lionel quietly. "Sometimes I would spend a day or two with him, and now and again he would go for an outing with me. But he would never consent to come to my home. As you may know, he hated houses, and he hated any sort of conventionality."

"I had better tell you, too, that I have recently been in very serious financial trouble," continued Sir Lionel. "I am afraid I have made a severe mess of my investments. Like an old fool; I kept my troubles to myself, believing all the time that I could extricate myself. But matters got worse and worse."

I had gone into the dining-room, as a matter of fact, to take a cup of hot coffee that Pringle had left for me in a Thermos flask."

"No doubt you thought that Dr. Leighton had arrived?"

"I thought it possible, and yet I was rather puzzled," said Sir Lionel. "I had been expecting him to knock at the front door in the conventional fashion. I went into the library, and you can imagine my surprise when I found a man at the safe. As I now know, he was this fellow, Dawson. He bolted as soon as I appeared, showing no fight whatever."

"That was Dawson's way," nodded Blake. "He never attacked anybody in his life."

"I ran to the french windows, and heard the man rushing away," said Sir Lionel. "I hardly knew what to do. It was useless for me to follow, since I

met with an accident—he believed that a car had hit him. But before I could even begin to question him, or make any sort of reply, he fell dead at my feet."

**I**T was some moments before Sir Lionel Bland continued. The recollection of that dreadful moment had unnerved him, and he had gone much paler.

"I knew he was dead," he continued at length. "I have seen death before—and I was sure that I could not be mistaken. I believe I rushed out—but frankly I cannot tell you much of what happened just then. For I was distracted—well-nigh overcome by the horror of it all."

"But you are certain that you rushed out?"

"He had mentioned something about an accident, and I imagined, I suppose, that a motor-car was outside in the

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## The BROKEN MELODY

"They generally do," put in Waldo. "They have a habit of doing that."

"At last, in desperation, I wrote to Dr. Leighton and explained the full position to him," said Sir Lionel. "In that same letter I asked him to lend me some money—so that I could get out of my immediate difficulties. Rather to my surprise, he sent me a telegram yesterday, saying that he was coming to my house, bringing money with him. I had no idea that he would respond so promptly, and, as you can imagine, I was delighted by his loyalty and friendship. In my extremity he had waived his objections to visiting my home, and he was coming to my aid. He furthermore told me that he would come late at night, after the servants had gone to bed. He was a queer man—not to say eccentric."

"And so you waited up?" asked Blake. "Pringle was very worried about you, Sir Lionel."

"I know he was, poor old fellow," said the other. "Well, in accordance with Dr. Leighton's wishes, I waited up for him—and it was while I was waiting that I heard some sounds in the library.

could not run at anything like the same speed. So I went indoors to telephone to the police. As frequently happens late at night, the exchange was a long while in answering, and while I was hanging on I heard another sound from the library. So I put the receiver on its hook, and went quickly into the library, and I was dumbfounded—horrified—to see Dr. Leighton clutching at the desk, his face and head in an absolutely ghastly condition."

"It must have been a dreadful shock for you," said Blake gently.

"It was," muttered the other. "As I now know, Dr. Leighton had been struck, head-on, by that burglar's motor-cycle. But at the time I forgot every word about the burglar. He passed clean out of my mind."

"That was only natural."

"I ran to Dr. Leighton, and he seemed to recognise me as I gripped him," said Sir Lionel. "Although mortally wounded, it is now obvious that Dr. Leighton must have got into the grounds of my house, and, seeing the lighted french windows, he staggered to them. He gasped out that he had

road," said Sir Lionel. "But when I got to the gate there was nothing in sight—absolutely nothing. The wind buffeted round me, and the darkness was intense. I could not see a sign of any living soul. And I went back into the library, appalled, and more horrified than ever. And then suddenly it occurred to me that my own position was an awful one."

"But how was it?" put in Tinker.

"Think, boy—think!" said Sir Lionel. "There was no motor-car—no evidence of any accident. It struck me at once that Dr. Leighton must have been hit by a passing car, and that the latter had driven on. There are some road-hogs who do that sort of thing—and, indeed, such cases are becoming more numerous than ever. What was my position if this motorist remained silent?"

"I see your point," nodded Blake.

"I could not help being struck by the possibility," said Sir Lionel. "Finding no car there, I concluded at once that the driver had bolted—probably believing that he had only slightly injured his victim. Actually, of course, the motor-cycle must have been on the road, some-

where comparatively near by—and, indeed, Mr. Waldo must have been there, too, with the unfortunate Dawson.”

“But, naturally, in the darkness, you saw nothing of them,” nodded Blake. “You were only looking for a smashed car.”

“Exactly!” said the other. “I remember going back into my library and kneeling down by Dr. Leighton’s side. But he was dead, and I could do nothing for him. It was strange how he had been so mortally wounded, and how he had managed to stagger into my library like that.”

“There have been many similar instances,” said Blake. “Indeed, in some cases people have been known to walk for miles, or to get on their bicycles again, only to collapse an hour or so afterwards, and to die within a minute. The case of Dr. Leighton is by no means exceptional.”

“Well, as I have told you, I was horrified by a realisation of my own position,” said Sir Lionel Bland. “Nobody knew that he had been coming to my house that night; and yet he had come, bringing a large sum of money. And there was I, with this man in my house battered to death. I was appalled. Furthermore, you must remember that I figure largely in Dr. Christopher Leighton’s will. What would happen to me if I told the police everything? I reviewed these points, and the more I thought of them the greater became my agitation. Inevitably I would find myself arrested for murdering the poor man. As far as I could see, there was no shred of evidence that an accident had happened.”

“And then I blew in,” said Waldo, nodding. “There must be something comforting about my personality; because Sir Lionel was reassured in a very short time, and he gave me all sorts of details.”

“I must confess that I was overwhelmed by Mr. Waldo’s personality,” said Sir Lionel. “He introduced himself to me as the Peril Expert, and said that he was perfectly agreeable to help me in my extremity. In extenuation of my conduct, Mr. Blake, I must tell you that I was so utterly distraught that I would have agreed to almost anything. I was nearly out of my mind with worry and agony—yes, and fright.”

“I can well believe it,” said Blake feelingly. “Your position was desperate—although I do not for a moment agree that your conclusions were sound. It was by no means inevitable that the police would suspect you of murder.”

“Well, anyway, Sir Lionel gave me the facts,” said Waldo. “He told me of his fears; and he mentioned, too, how closely he resembled Dr. Leighton—providing that Dr. Leighton’s whiskers were trimmed off, and his hair shortened. It was that which gave me an idea.”

“A gruesome idea—a horrible idea!” said Sir Lionel, shuddering.

“Well, the situation was desperate,” said the Wonder-Man. “And it seemed to be a very simple way out of the whole trouble. Sir Lionel was in financial straits, and he had nobody dependent upon him—no family. And I had been told, remember, that Dr. Leighton lived alone on a motor-yacht. Well, I decided that Sir Lionel should become Dr. Leighton. He was going to inherit the doctor’s money, anyhow; so there was nothing crooked about it, and the wheeze would make him safe from any police inquiry, or any other kind of trouble.”

“I was mad to consent to it!” muttered Sir Lionel brokenly.

“You can see that now, but at the

time you were doubtless carried away by Waldo’s enthusiasm,” said Blake. “And Waldo, although having the best of motives, is a fellow of extraordinarily fantastic and whimsical ideas. You are, Waldo. It’s no good denying it.”

“Well, perhaps I am,” admitted Waldo. “But I must say that this scheme struck me as being the goods.”

“I suppose you took charge of the whole business?”

“I did,” agreed Waldo. “I told Sir Lionel to strip, and he did this in the dining-room. I won’t go into any close details, but I’ll tell you that I changed the clothing on the body. A pretty rotten sort of job; but as I considered that it was all in a good cause, I didn’t mind so much.”

“And then?”

“Then I carefully shaved Dr. Leighton, and I was startled by the close resemblance to Sir Lionel,” said Waldo. “I knew at once that the game would be a success. For I could have sworn that it was Sir Lionel Bland who was on the floor, dead. And when his hair was trimmed, the illusion was all the more complete. You must remember that the poor fellow was terribly battered, and any casual examination would not reveal the fact that the body was really that of another man.”

Waldo lit a cigarette, and was thoughtful for a few moments.

“I packed Sir Lionel off,” he continued presently. “In fact, I went with him to the Greyhound, and saw him on a tram that was going to Westminster Bridge. I instructed him to go straight to the yacht, and to get on board and wait for me.”

“Why did you not go with him all the way?” asked Blake.

“Because I wanted to remain behind to see that everything went properly,” replied Waldo. “I turned over some chairs in the library, prepared the ebony ruler, and left one of the french windows open—and banging. I reckoned that the noise would soon bring one of the household down. Everything pointed to the fact that a burglar had been in, and that there had been a grim struggle, during which the supposed Sir Lionel had been felled to death.”

Sexton Blake nodded.

“And in your enthusiasm for this scheme, Waldo,” he said, “you evidently overlooked the fact that the dead body of Smiler Dawson was still out there on the common.”

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Better Way.

THE Wonder-Man slowly nodded.

“Yes,” he confessed, “I overlooked Smiler Dawson. “And yet I am not sure that’s exactly true,” he added.

“Once or twice I thought of the man, and I really did not see what I could do. I almost decided in fact, that it was better that he should remain out there, to be discovered by some passer-by. I thought it would complicate the mystery. But how on earth was I to guess that you, of all fellows, Blake, would be the one to find him?”

“I wasn’t,” said Blake. “I went to Stowe Lodge in response to a telephone message from Pringle, the butler.”

“How did you know that I was connected with the business?”

“You were careless enough to leave a finger-print on the ground near Dawson’s body.”

“That’s the worst of having a criminal record!” grunted Waldo.

“You compared the finger-prints, and

found mine at once, I suppose? H’m! Naturally, I wasn’t prepared for anything like that. I might as well tell you now, that I was hanging about Stowe Lodge for an hour or two, and I saw you arrive, Blake, with the chief inspector and Tinker.”

“And the shrivelling of Dr. Leighton’s body?” asked Blake grimly.

“Oh, that!” said Waldo. “Well, to tell you the truth, I began to get a bit worried about Dr. Leighton. I was particularly worried when a medical man turned up—Dr. Turner, I think his name is. It occurred to me that if Dr. Turner made a very close examination he would find out that it was the wrong body. So I was very relieved when I heard that Dr. Turner was not allowed to make any close examination—until the police had finished their work.”

“But how did you know all this?” asked Tinker. “We didn’t see you anywhere about.”

“I was there, all the same,” said the Wonder-Man. “As you may know, Tinker, my hearing is a bit acute—and I’m an agile beggar, too. I got into that adjoining room, after you had carried the body into it, and—well, I shrivelled it.”

“Horrible!” muttered Sir Lionel, with a shiver.

“It was horrible, I’ll admit,” said Waldo quietly. “But I had a double reason for doing that thing. I was rather startled at the knowledge of the strange force that was within me. I had an idea that it was waning, and I hoped so, too. Still, I wanted to put it to the proof—and here was a dead body, all ready for the experiment. It also occurred to me that it would be a good dodge to put you off the scent, Blake. And I wanted to prove that it really was something in me that had shrivelled Smiler Dawson. I didn’t know for certain, you must remember—I only suspected.”

“That is true,” admitted Blake.

“Furthermore, by shrivelling Dr. Leighton’s body, it would make identification practically impossible,” said Waldo shrewdly. “Don’t you see? Sir Lionel had already been identified by Pringle, and after he had been shrivelled there wouldn’t be the slightest question of doubt regarding the body’s identity. And the family doctor could examine it as much as he liked, without any fear of complications. And so, with these thoughts in my mind, I sneaked into that adjoining room, and held the body in my arms.”

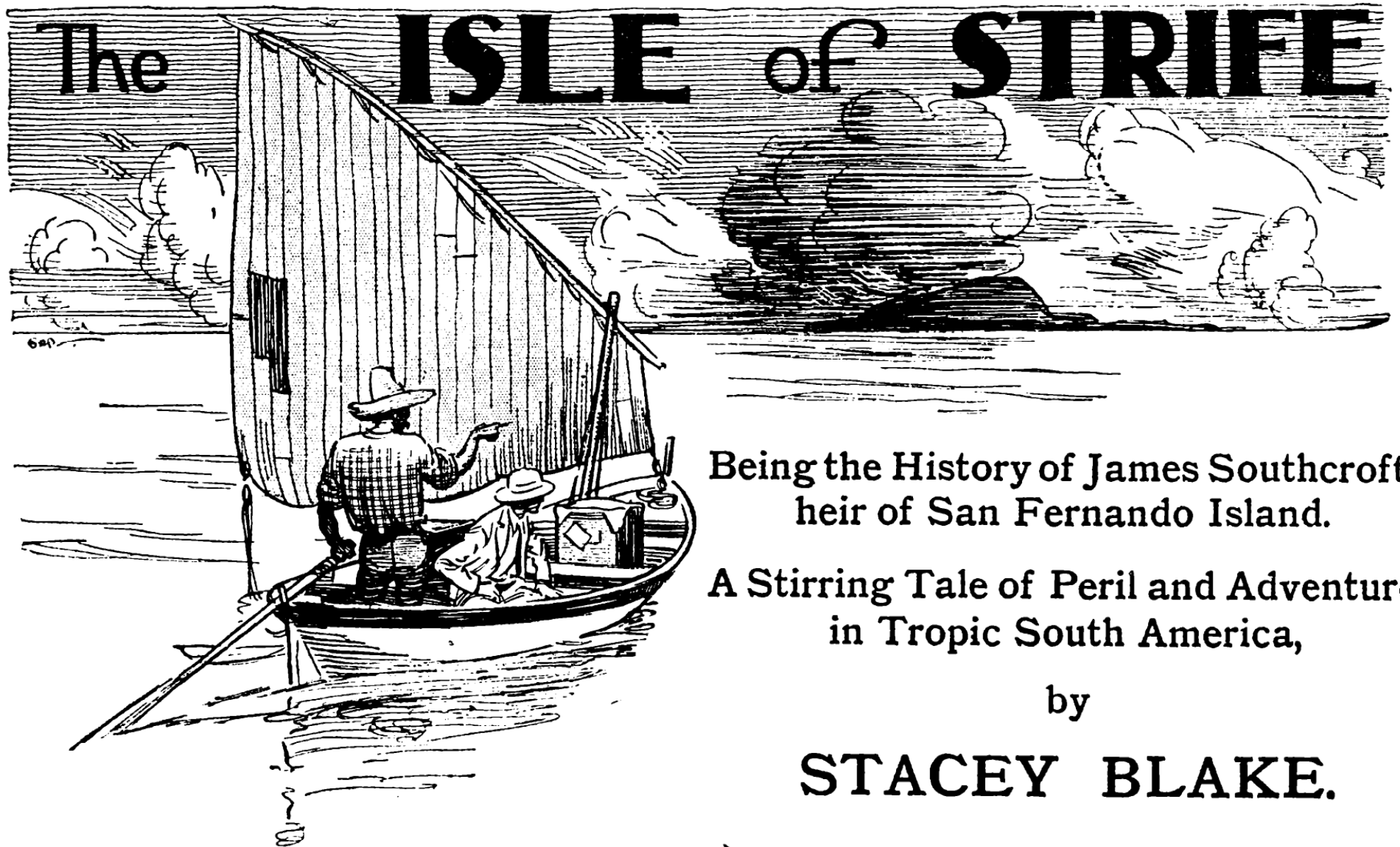
“But you had previously handled it pretty much,” said Tinker. “What about changing the clothes, and doing the shaving, and all that?”

“Any such handling, then, was necessarily brief,” replied Waldo. “And, in fact, when I remembered that nothing had happened to the body, I began to have doubts regarding Dawson. I thought, perhaps, that he had shrivelled because of some peculiarity in his own body. That’s why I wanted to put the thing to the test. As you know, it succeeded. But it was necessary for me to hold that dead body of Dr. Leighton in my arms for nearly a quarter of an hour. You see, the force was growing weaker in me—and I hope to goodness that it will be entirely gone within a day or two. It’s an infernally uncomfortable sort of thing to have about you.”

“Well, I think the position is fairly clear now,” said Blake, rising to his feet. “But why did you refuse to tell me all this at your rooms, Waldo? It had been much better if you had taken me into your full confidence then?”

(Concluded on page 28.)

## Our Brilliant Serial of Romance and Adventure.



Being the History of James Southcroft,  
heir of San Fernando Island.

A Stirring Tale of Peril and Adventure  
in Tropic South America,

by

**STACEY BLAKE.**

**J**IM SOUTHCROFT, last of the Southcrofts, heirs of San Fernando Island, has come out from England to claim his heritage and avenge the murder of his father.

Ever since Jakes Southcroft had captured the island from the pirate Mendoza in the eighteenth century, San Fernando had been ruled by Southcrofts. But now, apparently, the islanders, tiring of the claims of a foreigner, had decided to free themselves by killing off the family one by one.

On the island grows a narcotic weed, valasso, for the lucrative cultivation of which a gang of Americans, led by one Schwalback, are trying to get possession of the fertile land from the islanders.

Strangely enough, Jim is rescued from drowning by a beautiful girl, who turns out to be Dolores Mendoza, last descendant of the old pirate, and therefore opposed to Jim, though she convinces him she knows nothing of the recent murders. They fall in love with each other, and the girl again saves Jim and his friend Tommy Wilford when the valasso men invade her settlement.

Jim and Tommy take the girl to the sanctuary of a convent, after which they set out for the main town. On reaching it, Tommy points out the house at the door of which Jim's grandfather had made his last stand before being killed by the islanders.

### News of the Past.

**J**IM looked reflectively at the doorway. He seemed to see the thing happening. He felt his own blood moving more quickly. He had the impulse to go and stand on that same spot and to face any hostility that might come. Tommy looked at him, and gathered from his face the thoughts that were at the back of his mind.

"Go slowly," he said. "We've had enough trouble for one day. I beg

your pardon, it happened yesterday. Well, I'd sooner have a dull day to-day with nothing doing at all. And there's a matter of breakfast, too."

"I was thinking that, after all, as my grandfather's heir, that is my home."

"Yes, of course. But it doesn't look as though they've got any red carpet down to welcome you. What's your idea of breakfast? Fish, eh? To be followed by omelettes and pints of coffee? Come along with me. A man can take a healthier view of things with a good breakfast inside him. I've been starving so long that, apart from the choice of food, my judgment isn't to be trusted."

There were two cafes on one side of the plaza under an arcade held up by pillars of stone. Little tables and chairs were set out in the shade for the convenience of clients who liked to keep one eye on their refreshment and another on the market. One of these establishments was called Cafe of the Sun, and the other the Cafe of the Two Brothers. Tommy indicated the latter.

"I have eaten their omelettes," he said. "Also their tortillas are less gritty than at the other show. I have tried all the foods and drinks of this village during the past week, and I know what to pick on—and the other, too. The cut-throat who owns the joint is called Emanuel. His vice is politics, but he can cook. And he'll be complimented when he knows the new lord of the island takes his first almuerzo at the Cafe of the Two Brothers."

"About that I should keep a still tongue for the moment," advised Jim.

Emanuel Zorzi, with three days' beard on his terraces of chins, black hair cropped so severely that his stubble looked long by comparison, a

large smile and a protuberant waist-belt, came forward and took their order.

"It is unusual to eat so much so early," he commented, "but you are English, yes? And those people eat strangely. But this cafe can accommodate itself to every circumstance. The senors have the great appetite, yes. Perhaps you have come far, and starved on the road."

"Who knows?" said Jim, in the manner of the Spanish lands. "It is quite possible."

"Anything is possible in these times, senors," said the other, spreading out his hands, "and to eat is always good. Yes, it shall be as you say."

**A**ND when both had fallen to and eaten well, and even called for more, Emanuel Zorzi came again, his eye on more gossip.

"The great appetite and the power to be friendly with one's food is good," he said, with the air of one who has reckoned up most of the problems of the world. "You feel better—yes?"

Jim nodded, and Tommy added the information, in doubtful Spanish, that he was feeling gay.

"That is good. We are all feeling gay to-day—by order," he added significantly. "It is a fiesta—the fiesta of Saint Valasso," he added with obscure humour.

"What's that?" asked Jim quickly. "I've never heard of that saint before."

"Nor anyone else, senor. To-day the new Loru of San Fernando takes his place as president of the council."

"But valasso is that vile drug that grows on the island."

"True. Though it should not be



called vile altogether. It has its uses. Little Paco, the fisherman, who was mauled by a shark, ate it while his leg was being taken off, and he felt nothing. But yes, it may turn men into logs."

"It nearly cost me my life," said Jim reminiscently. "But this new lord, eh?"

"He is the nominee of the company that has so much money that it can buy up our people—some of them—and enslave others," Zorzi said, dropping his voice and looking alertly towards the doorway, "the company that would turn all the island into a farm to grow valasso."

"Is this new lord of the island bought, or enslaved?" asked Jim, feeling for his tobacco.

"Are not both much the same, senior? Who gives himself to the getting of money is enslaved. He is a man of San Fernando, one Pedro Ugarte, and money has made him forget the liberty and honour of his own people."

"So that is why the flags are hanging from the houses. We seem to have come just at the right time."

"Yes," said Jim, filling his pipe carefully as though it were an act requiring great consideration. The proprietor of the Cafe of the Two Brothers watched the act thoughtfully, this being a land of the cigarette and cheroot.

"So the senior smokes tobacco in the pipe? There are few do that here unless it is a sailor from some big ship that takes away sugar. But there was one who used to smoke a pipe. He was the last lord of the island. He was killed on the top of those steps we can just see from here."

Jim's eyes involuntarily travelled in the direction indicated.

"Those steps, senior, just behind those red pimientos in the market there."

The splash of red colour beside the steps somehow suggested to Jim the dreadful comparison of blood that had once lain on those stones. He looked at the scarlet fruit with tragic sternness in his eyes. And his mouth was set hard and grim like a steel trap. He swung a swift questioning glance round on the cafe-keeper.

"Who killed him?" he demanded.

The man's ready speech suddenly evaporated. His fat shoulders were elevated in the scarcely perceptible manner that means ignorance—or an unwillingness to answer.

"Who knows?" he said evasively. "This other one—he who is bought for foreign gold—may share the same fate. For there are patriots in San Fernando."

"The murderer, then, was one of those you call the patriots?" asked Jim, with a little sagging about the eyes, and a subtle strain coming on the line of his mouth.

"I would not say so, senior. In my business it is well not to see too much."

"But you saw this?" pursued Jim relentlessly.

"Nor to know too much about things," added Emanuel Zorzi.

"But you know this. Tell me who killed Jakes Southeroft."

"There was a crowd about him, senior, just as the crowd is about the market to-day. It was unknown who struck the blow. I do not know. One says this man and one says another."

"But who do they say? Who are suspected? From among them I can pick out the guilty man, and I can decide if he committed the crime on his own impulse, or if someone was behind him."

Jim had risen to his feet. He stood looking at the man with keen eyes. But his gaze was fairly met by eyes that did not waver.

"Who are you that you are so interested in what is, after all, an affair of San Fernando?" Zorzi asked.

"I am a Southeroft," said Jim quietly.

**T**HE other's eyes grew round with surprise, and his whole over-curved form insensibly stiffened.

"You a Southeroft, eh? You are not a son of the old man who—"

"Grandson."

"You have a look at the old man, senior, the old hawk he used to be called. Ever since you have been in I have wondered why you looked like that. I thought that perhaps all men of your race had that look. I see now. But if you are a Southeroft, you will be safer away from San Fernando. It is my loss to send away a client who appreciates good cooking, but there it is. Your excellency will not find safety in San Fernando."

He inclined his head. He spoke with a new respect.

"If I had been seeking safety, I should not have come here," answered Jim, with a little contempt in his tone. "I am seeking something else."

"You may find what your grandfather found. The knife flashes quickly in San Fernando, excellency. And more often than not it comes from behind."

"He's got eyes behind, old sport," broke in Tommy, with his peculiar Spanish, which was an attempt at translation direct from English idiom, "and I have never met a man who could take better care of himself. If any of these local thugs are

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calculating on showing him something ugly, then they'd better think again."

"Then one may assume that the senor has come here prepared for trouble," said the other, in a detached and indifferent manner. "Assuredly he will find it."

"And someone else may find it, too," retorted Tommy cheerfully. "I say, who lives in that house over the way—the house with the steps behind the pimientos?"

"It belonged to the old lord. It has always been occupied by the Southcrofts. The new lord, Pedro Ugarte, is likely to live there, if, indeed, he is not already in possession."

"Man, we ought to leave our cards on him," suggested Tommy. "If we aren't distinguished visitors, what are we?"

"We'll do that in good time," said Jim significantly.

"What about somewhere to sleep—in case?" suggested Tommy. "This is a fonda—a hotel. I have put in several nights here. There are fewer fleas than next door."

They engaged a couple of rooms.

"I hope, senors, you will be able to sleep in them," said the proprietor, with the lugubrious air of a man who has lost clients like that before.

### Jim Says "No."

**W**ITHIN the next two hours, Jim, under the guidance of Tommy, who had had the advantage of some days in the place, learnt a good deal of the geography of Puerto de San Fernando. There was the Calle Mayor, which ran from the Plaza down to the Marina—the water-side. Here were those who traded in the articles of use, ornament, and vanity most in demand. The sign over one shop "Perez, Saster," which is to say, tailor, reminded Jim that he wore a suit of peasant make, since his other had been left to dry at the farm of Dolores Mendoza.

"It will be very dry now," he commented. "Cinders, in fact. Suppose I start to encourage local trade by ordering a suit?"

"A suit made here will be a scream, you can bet, but it can't be worse than the one you've got on. And since we are studying appearances, I think a couple of shaves are indicated. Let's buzz round the old town first. That quay-side is picturesque, eh? Bit musical comedyish. Those balconies and the flowers drooping from them, and those coloured sails of the boats are scenic. That's the harbour where your illustrious ancestors sailed in and started to whack the pirate, Mendoza—and incidentally put us in for all this trouble."

"Yes. I suppose you can't call it anything else," Jim admitted. "And there's this I want to say: If it's panning out differently from the way you thought, and if you are getting bored by this business which, after all, you are not likely to get anything

out of, you must say so. I suppose there is some risk attached to it, and if you——"

"When I've got some grumbling to do, I'll mention it," grinned Tommy, "but don't ask me to give up my orangery. I want to see this harbour stacked up with cases bearing the label: 'Wilford's World-beating Oranges.' I want to lead a useful life, to make two oranges grow where only one grew before, but meanwhile, if we have to present the inhabitants with a good many thick ears as a preliminary to the planting of orange-trees, I'm going to tackle the job with a good heart."

And thus, having delivered himself, Tommy Wilford moved up the narrow lane of steps which was marked Calle de San Juan, and indicated an archway at the top and a grim stone building beyond.

"The castello, prison, fort, council-house, anything you jolly well like. They say it was built about the time of our Queen Elizabeth, and that the Spanish priests of that time, who were running the Inquisition, had a quite dainty set of prison cells and torture-chambers built into it. That's where the council is held, in a big chamber on the ground floor. There'll be a jolly crowd there. It would be rather sport to push in."

"That was my intention," said Jim. "I would like to see this Pedro Ugarte take his seat as president of the council."

"It will be a heartening sight. It will give you just the thrill you've been looking for. I say, old lad, what's your exact game?" he exclaimed with sudden seriousness.

"Anything or nothing. It might be useful to know just how popular is this nominee of the dope gang."

"And if he didn't happen to look popular enough?" queried Tommy expectantly.

"I fancy I've got to play the game just how and when I can."

"Yes, let's go and have a shave. If I'm going to be led into trouble, I like to look my best. The local custom of a clean shave once a week is a little too economical. That shop hanging out the round brass bowl with a slice out of it is a barber's."

**T**HEY presently returned to the street shaven, brushed, and scented, and they mixed among the throngs already moving about the narrow ways. Many a gaze was directed at them, many a sharp glance sought them out inquisitively. Under the noise of voices and the light chatter that filled the street, there seemed a sub-current of something tense, an air of waiting, a consciousness—subtly felt rather than strictly observed—of pending tragedy. It was as though, over this place of sunshine and colour, where human laughter and human happiness seemed as natural as the blue sky itself, was a brooding shadow.

A small boy came and touched Jim on the arm.

"Emanuel Zorzi wants to speak to you, senor," he said, and was gone before Jim could seek a coin for him.

"I was thinking a drink would not harm us," Tommy said. "Let us go and moisten."

They went across the Plaza to the Cafe of the Two Brothers. Zorzi, in honour of the fiesta, had visited the barber, and his tiers of chins were now smooth, with an olive-coloured suavity that gave one the intense desire to stroke them. In other respects his countenance was severe.

"It is known that you are here, senor," he said, addressing Jim.

"Can it be otherwise?" answered Jim. "I have not hidden. I have walked about the streets."

"Yes; but it is known that you are a Southcroft. It is said you have stirred things up inland, and that you are here for no good. There are some here who are your enemies. I am running risk myself in telling you, for the saints know well politics are no good to a cafetero who only lives to supply drinks to all who thirst, yet I cannot see you run into a trap with your eyes shut."

"My eyes have never been so wide open," Jim said.

"Nevertheless you may not know what is against you. This great company with many dollars behind it is not an affair for one man to tackle. I, who am no politician, can see that."

"What you don't know about the politics of this benighted territory aren't worth knowing," grinned Tommy. "What is there fresh on the board?"

"Only that if I were the senor I should go down to the quay and charter the first boat I could get and sail away from San Fernando, providing, that is, I cared the price of a drink for my life."

"You are a cheerful bird. Let us have three of the best drinks you have got on tap."

"They may be your last," said Zorzi.

"Then if they are there'll be others who won't have the chance to drink much more," observed Jim, hitching up a hard shape in his hip pocket.

"You have the look in your face, senor, of the old man who was struck down on those steps where the red pimientos are piled," said Zorzi, as he hurried away to order the drinks. "He went, and you will go the same way," he added, when he came back. "When the new lord of the island is installed in council to-day, things will happen."

"That is my own opinion," Jim said. "But they may not be just the kind of things that this Pedro Ugarte has arranged."

The drinks arrived, long, cunning concoctions of fresh fruit juice and soda-water with a little substratum of golden liqueur that was the essence of sunshine.

"Then I don't do any good by telling you," the cafetero said, as he lifted the glass to his lips. "Well, I hope you will come back to occupy your beds to-night. There are colder beds," he added, looking down at the

ground. "We must all occupy them some time, but the sunshine is too good to leave before it is necessary."

Both Britons went out with smiles on their faces and pistols loose.

"A tough pair, all the same," commented Emanuel Zorzi to himself. "Perhaps the history of San Fernando is going to have a violent twist this day."

**T**He two young men made an easy way through the crowd that surged about the entrance to the Castello. The great doors were closed, and they would not be opened till the first of the councillors arrived. There was little time to wait before a group of men arrived all together, evidently having met on the road, for they were delegates from the little provinces outside the town.

And then, even before the city members had arrived, it was the signal for the spectators to enter.

Jim and Tommy joined the jostling throng of peasants and townspeople, of fishermen and shop-keepers, and presently they found themselves in a low balcony some ten feet from the floor of the ancient hall, on which were arranged the seats of the council now assembling. At one end of the hall was an elevated seat. On the wall above the seat was painted a coat-of-arms on a shield. Above the shield was the model of a brig in full sail. Jim saw both these with burning eyes. That coat-of-arms was familiar to him. It had been the one little vanity of his father, a plain business man, to use the arms of the Southerofts on his notepaper. Tommy perceived it, too.

"The coat-of-arms is familiar, what? Gives you that homey feeling. What about the ship?"

"It's a model of the brig, Creole, sailed by Captain James Southeroft into San Fernando a century and a quarter ago."

The councillors, who had been sprawling on seats, suddenly began to rise with a great scuffling of feet.

A man was coming through the doorway at the far end. He was a well-dressed figure, in a dark jacket and trousers, and a white shirt. At the junction of trousers and shirt was a red silk handkerchief that, tied round his waist, gave him a touch of the theatrical. His black hair was smooth and shiny, like polished ebony. A hooked nose was like a ridge of mountains between two black craters—his eyes.

He moved forward to the elevated seat, twisted round like an automaton on reaching it, and faced the assembly with a dramatic gesture. He sat down, and it was the signal for the delegates to take their seats again.

In a moment he rose to speak. The sunlight from an open window played on his face. The matter he spoke was airy stuff; this was a great day in the history of San Fernando; liberty had come in the place of the old oppression; wealth would come to the island by reason of the new cultivation—there were the beginnings of a murmuring at this statement—a new era of government had begun, as a token of which he would take down the shield bearing the arms of a hated rule that had gone for ever!

He turned half a shoulder towards the offending symbol, and made a theatrical gesture and a final gush of speech.

"I shall take it down. It shall be burned in the Plaza as a sign to all men, and the smoke shall go up to heaven in token that the Southeroft despotism is ended!"

On the last word he twisted round and reached up his arm. He had barely touched the shield when a voice boomed out from the balcony:

"No!"

Save for the sharp intake of a hundred breaths, the dramatic interruption had the effect of creating frozen silence. Dark faces looked up. The spell of surprise held them.

Not all of them could see the speaker in the low gallery, for a pillar hid him.

Pedro Ugarte, in his fiesta clothes, was not one of them. He turned about and saw above him a man with a fierce, lean face—a man who was obviously of the nation of those who had lorded it in San Fernando.

His accent betrayed him if his face had not. He was grasping a magazine pistol in one hand, and the eyes behind the sight of it were harsh and unrelenting. And behind this man sat another, whose hair was flaming red, and whose face was gay at the prospect of fight. Ugarte dropped his hand and turned about and faced the man who threatened him.

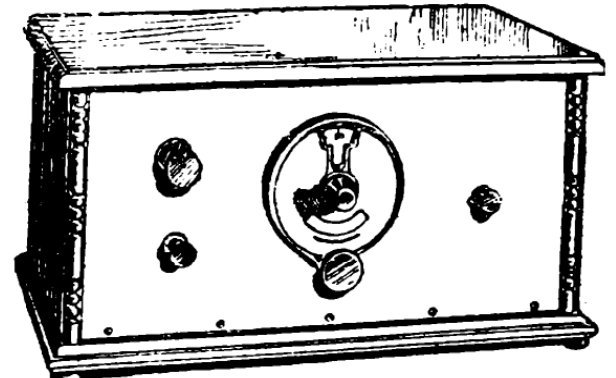
"Who are you?" he demanded. "And what do you want?"

"I am a Southeroft," Jim replied. "I am here to take my place."

And of a sudden he stood up, put a leg over the edge of the gallery, and leaped the ten feet downward to the floor below.

*(Nothing underhanded about Jim's methods! Boldness is his style—but how will the islanders take it?)*

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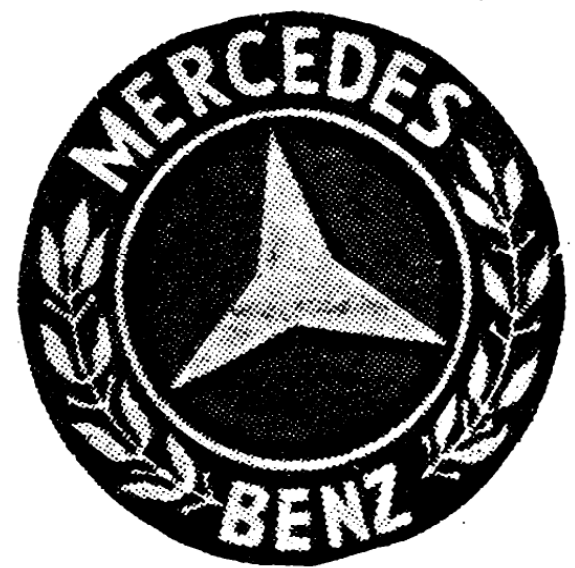
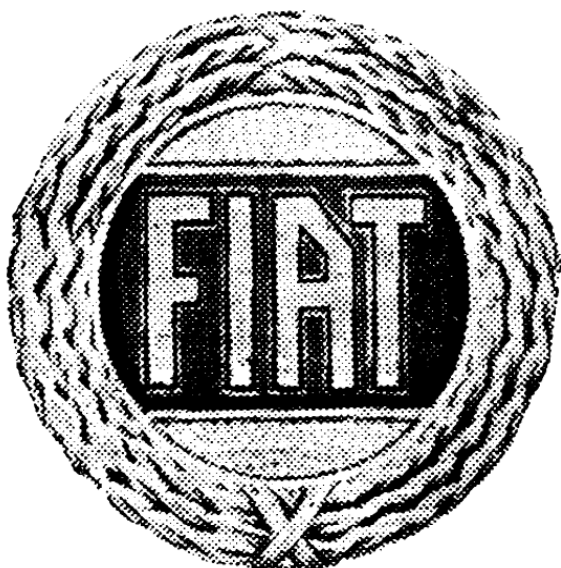
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(Continued from page 23.)

"It would; but I didn't think so at the time," said the Wonder-Man frankly. "I was irritated because you had butted in—for I considered that I was on a perfectly legitimate case. I had done nothing wrong, and Sir Lionel had done nothing wrong."

"But it was wrong to take possession of Dr. Leighton's yacht—"

"Legally, perhaps; but I cannot agree that it was morally wrong," said Waldo. "Dr. Leighton was dead, so what did it matter? My idea was to turn Sir Lionel into Dr. Leighton at once. So, having joined him on the yacht, and having made him comfortable, I went to my room to fetch the necessary make-up—and I found you there, Blake."

"And you calmly shoved us into your safe!" said Tinker indignantly.

"But only for an hour," replied Waldo. "I took the make-up, but I couldn't even get busy on Sir Lionel, because he objected. Now that the thing was nearly a success, he cut up rusty, and said that he was going to place the whole matter in charge of the police: I was arguing with him, trying to persuade him, when you came on board."

"Mr. Waldo's idea was for me to wear this make-up for some days," said Sir Lionel Bland. "He wanted me to go off on a prolonged cruise—some-where down the Thames estuary, in a secluded backwater. There I was to spend some weeks, and grow hair just like Dr. Leighton's. I have no doubt that the scheme would have been successful, for Dr. Leighton was very much of a recluse, and, after the necessary interval of time, I should have resembled him in the most startling way."

"I'll admit, Blake, that when I found you on the track, I practically gave up hope," said Waldo. "What are you going to do about it all?"

"You'll have to take this yacht back to Westminster," said Blake. "And I shall tell Scotland Yard the full details."

"That'll mean trouble," said Blake. "I hardly think so," said Blake. "And even if trouble arises, it will be comparatively slight."

"But are you sure, Mr. Blake?" asked Sir Lionel, who was almost grey with agitation. "Do you think the police

will believe me? Supposing—supposing just for a moment—that my story is discredited? The case against me will be stronger than ever! I shall inevitably be placed in the dock, accused of murdering—"

"There is one thing that you have overlooked, Sir Lionel," interrupted Blake.

"I am not surprised!" muttered Sir Lionel brokenly. "Perhaps I have overlooked many things."

"The motor-cycle," said the great detective.

"The motor-cycle?"

"Yes."

"But—but I don't understand."

"Yet it is very simple," said Blake.

"That motor-cycle must be somewhere. And if it is located and examined it will be clear enough that an accident took place. The police will naturally credit the story—just as they assumed that murder had been committed at your house."

"The motor-cycle had not been seen then, and its presence was not even suspected. Even I had not the faintest idea that both men had been killed in an accident, and, strangely enough, in the same accident. The mysterious disappearance of the motor-cycle, indeed, was the main cause of the whole misunderstanding."

**T**HERE was a long conference at Scotland Yard that morning, and Sir Lionel Bland and Rupert Waldo were closely questioned and cross-examined by the Chief Commissioner. Once again the whole story was thrashed out, repeated, and every detail examined.

Waldo maintained his attitude of complete justification. As he declared, he had merely been following his avocation as a Peril Expert. Here was a man who was in sore straits, and Waldo saw his opportunity of using his own peculiar powers to put things right.

By this time, too, news of the motor-cycle had turned up.

It was learned that a local resident, going home late the previous night, had found the wrecked machine in the middle of the road. In the darkness, and with the wind blowing a gale, he had seen no sign of the owner.

Smiler Dawson, of course, had crashed over, and the motor-cycle had run on for more than a hundred yards after

the accident. Thus, when this local resident found the machine, Dawson was comparatively near by—and perhaps Waldo had been with him at that very moment, too. But owing to the darkness and the storm they had not been visible or audible.

So the local resident, with the best intentions in the world, had taken the machine into his own garage; and had left it there for the night. The first thing in the morning, however, he had discovered bloodstains on the headlamp and on other parts of the machine, and he had promptly taken the motor-cycle to the police station, telling his story.

Of course, this man had been at fault. He should have taken the machine to the police immediately upon finding it. He had acted with unwarrantable effrontery, indeed, in putting the motor-cycle in his own garage, and then calmly going to bed, without even communicating with the police.

However, a close examination of the machine convinced the police that Sir Lionel Bland's story was absolutely true. Smiler Dawson and Dr. Christopher Leighton had met their deaths solely owing to the folly of Dawson in riding off on his machine without switching on the light.

And so the affair ended. Sir Lionel was lectured very severely by the Scotland Yard officials, but no action was taken against him. And Rupert Waldo, too, only received a wiggling. Not that this had the slightest effect upon him.

"They can say what they like," he confided to Sexton Blake afterwards. "But I'm a Peril Expert, and I was just doing my job. However, it's all for the best, perhaps, that the truth has come out. Poor old Sir Lionel's troubles are over."

"Well, in future, Waldo, I hope you'll choose your cases with a little more discretion," said Blake drily.

"I don't choose them at all," replied Rupert Waldo. "As a general rule they come to me—just as this one did. And the funny thing is, you generally manage to get on the same scent, Blake. I wonder when we shall meet again in the course of our professional duties?"

As events were to turn out, only a very few weeks were destined to elapse before Sexton Blake and Rupert Waldo once again came into close contact with one another.

THE END.

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