

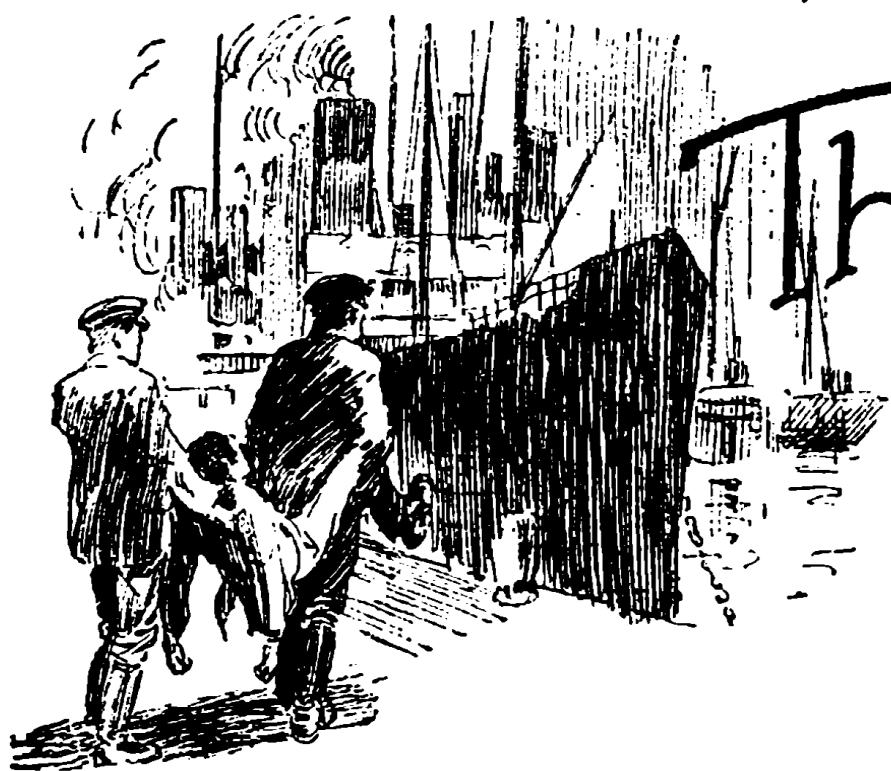
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THE SHANGHAIED DETECTIVE.

An Exciting, Long, Complete Story of SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, and that Attractive Character, WALDO, the Wonder-Man. Written by the Author of "The Affair of the Bronze Monkey," "The Clue of the Frozen Knife," "The Case of the Five Hairs," Tinker's "Letter-File" Series, "Nipper at St. Frank's" Series, including the previous Stories of Waldo, the Wonder-Man.



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(The Narrative Related Throughout by Tinker.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Persistence of Mr. Walter van Dusen

SEXTON BLAKE frowned and shook his head.

"No, Tinker!" he said decidedly. "Certainly not!"

"Eh?" I said, looking up from the morning paper. "Certainly not what, gov'nor?"

It was breakfast time, and the gov'nor and I were in the midst of our morning meal. I had been rather interested in a paragraph, and had been taking no notice of my surroundings.

Now, however, I saw that Mrs. Bardell was standing just inside the doorway, and that Sexton Blake was fingering a visiting-card, and gazing at it as though the thing had done him some personal injury.

"Has somebody had the nerve to call at this hour of the morning, gov'nor?" I asked, stirring my coffee. "Naturally you can see

"That is not the point, Tinker!" interrupted Sexton Blake. "I do not think I should feel inclined to see this doubtful gentleman at any time of the day. What is your opinion?"

And the gov'nor passed the card across to me. I looked at it with interest, wondering why Blake should be so severe in his tone. On the card I read the name and address—"Walter van Dusen, Hatton Garden, London, E.C."

I recognised the name at once, for Mr. Walter van Dusen was a famous diamond merchant, and a most important personage. But I answered Sexton Blake's question without a moment's hesitation.

"I wouldn't see him if he was the last man on earth, gov'nor!" I said grimly.

The gov'nor smiled and took the card back.

"Kindly tell Mr. Van Dusen that an interview is inconvenient, Mrs. Bardell," he said. "If he seems inclined to persist, be firm."

"Very good, sir!" said the housekeeper.

She retired, and closed the door. Sexton Blake and I continued our breakfast, and as I helped myself to dry toast and marmalade I saw that the gov'nor was looking more thoughtful than usual.

"A bit of a scoundrel, isn't he, gov'nor?" I asked.

"He is more than a bit of a one, Tinker," replied Blake. "Mr. Walter van Dusen, the famous diamond merchant of Hatton Garden, although to all appearances an upright, honourable man, is actually one of the most despicable rogues in London. I do not care to think of the number of people he has deliberately ruined."

"And yet the law can't touch him," I observed. "That seems wrong, gov'nor."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"It is wrong, my boy," he replied quietly. "But there are many things which are wrong in this world. I have had some experience—

indirectly—of Mr. Van Dusen, and I should need to be in a desperate plight before I accepted a commission from him. If he has been robbed, I should not lift a finger to help him. I almost find myself hoping that he has been robbed."

I grinned. "Your opinion of Mr. Van Dusen, gov'nor, isn't exactly flattering," I remarked. "It's rather a wonder he's approached you, isn't it? I shouldn't think a man with his conscience would come to you."

"My dear Tinker, pray be reasonable!" protested Sexton Blake. "You surely do not suppose that Mr. Van Dusen possesses a conscience? A man with his record can only be a soulless reptile."

"What a pity he isn't up here to hear these compliments, gov'nor!" I chuckled. "I should just like to see his face—Hallo! What's wrong?"

Mrs. Bardell had reappeared, looking somewhat flustered.

"The gentleman won't go, sir!" she panted.

"Oh, won't he?" said the gov'nor grimly. "Confound his impudence! Tell him that I positively refuse—"

"But he's upstairs, sir!" interrupted Mrs. Bardell. "And he's that excited he don't hardly know what he's doing. There! I do declare he's gone into the consulting-room—without so much as knocking!"

"All right, Mrs. Bardell, leave this to me," said Blake. "You may go downstairs at once. I will see Mr. Van Dusen off the premises."

The housekeeper retired, greatly relieved, and Sexton Blake rose to his feet.

"Want a hand, gov'nor?" I asked casually. "I don't mind helping to pitch the fellow downstairs—"

"We can't use violence, Tinker," interrupted the gov'nor. "The fellow is infernally impertinent to come up here after being told that I could not see him. I don't want to see him. I refuse to see him!"

"But he's in the consulting-room, gov'nor!" I objected.

"Exactly!" said Blake. "You will get rid of him, young 'un."

I grinned, and arose with alacrity. "Just as you like, gov'nor," I said. "I'll tell him politely, but firmly, that you don't care to interview men of his type. Burglars or forgers might have a chance, but not Mr. Walter van Dusen."

"Tell him what you like, but pitch him out!"

Sexton Blake was really angry, and I knew well enough why he would not deal with the intruder personally. Having stated that he could not see Mr. Van Dusen, he did not intend to do so—not even to throw him out.

It was very seldom that we had to deal with anything like this. People came to see the gov'nor, and were disappointed: but I could not recall another instance exactly like this one. Here was Mr. Van Dusen, a wealthy diamond merchant, on the verge of

being hoofed off the premises as though he were a common hooligan.

I entered the consulting-room with studied carelessness, intending to remain cold and icy throughout the brief interview. I soon found, however, that my task was not to be an easy one.

The very instant I entered the room there was a quick movement from the window, and Mr. Walter van Dusen faced me. I had never seen him before, but he was very much as I had pictured him in my mind—big, ungainly, and gross. His face was clean-shaven and coarse, and his head was half bald. He wore glasses, and his hands were red and puffy.

"Is Mr. Blake coming?" he asked quickly.

His voice was in keeping with his figure—hoarse and wheezy—although his speech was quite perfect. I imagined him to be a man of Dutch origin, judging from his name, but he was certainly English in his manner and speech.

"No, Mr. Van Dusen," I replied. "Mr. Blake is not coming."

"But he is here?" asked the diamond merchant. "Mr. Blake is at home?"

"Mr. Blake is not at home to you, sir," I replied. "I think he sent down a message to the effect that an interview was not convenient? If you will follow me, I will escort you downstairs—"

"Good heavens, boy, I must see Mr. Blake!" shouted Van Dusen. "Do you hear me? I must see him! I shall not budge from this room until I have seen him! Go at once and tell him what I say!"

I looked at the man squarely. I took him in from toe to crown, noting his immaculate attire and his spotless linen. He was aggressive, and an aggressive man always irritates me.

"We don't want any unpleasantness, Mr. Van Dusen," I said grimly. "I have already told you that Mr. Blake cannot see you. I don't ask you again to take your departure. I order you to clear out! That's plain language."

"You—you impudent young jackanapes!" roared Mr. Van Dusen furiously. "How—how dare you speak to me—"

He broke off abruptly, and mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief.

"I beg your pardon," he went on, remaining calm with an effort. "But if you knew how worried I am you would forgive this seemingly outrageous behaviour on my part. You are justified in ordering me to leave. I am an intruder; I am well aware of that fact."

"I'm glad you know that, Mr. Van Dusen," I said icily.

"I adopted a wrong tone, and I beg your forgiveness," went on the man. "I ask you in all sincerity—will you please tell Mr. Blake that I wish to see him on vitally urgent business? I beg of him to see me."

I didn't quite know what to do. As a matter of fact, I was rather sorry that he had eaten humble pie, for I was not in a position to act as I would have done. I couldn't kick the fellow out now.

"I'm sorry—" I began.
 "Let me see—you are Mr. Tinker, of course?" interrupted Mr. Van Dusen. "You are Mr. Blake's assistant? The truth is, I hardly know what I am doing, my boy. I have been robbed of diamonds to the value of fifty thousand pounds. Good heavens! Will not Mr. Blake help me in this terrible crisis?"

"You have the police—" "Pah! The police are useless!" snapped the visitor. "I need the most expert help that can be obtained; and I know full well that I could have approached no one better than Mr. Sexton Blake. But listen! I will tell you a few details of what occurred."

"It's no good, Mr. Van Dusen," I said sharply. "I wish you would realise—" "But you must hear me," interrupted the diamond merchant, grasping my arm feverishly and staring into my face. "You must! Then, perhaps, you will be able to induce Mr. Blake to listen. Last evening I remained late at my private office. I was expecting the arrival of a special messenger from South Africa; a man bringing a bag of diamonds—"

"You're wasting your breath," I put in impatiently.

"I am not—and you must attend to me," went on the unwelcome visitor. "This man—this messenger—was named Bryant, and I had never seen him before. He was sent from Cape Town by my agent in that city, and the whole affair was arranged to the last detail. He carried the diamonds secretly upon him, and the appointed hour of his arrival was nine o'clock last night—No, don't interrupt again. I intend to finish. Listen carefully."

"The messenger arrived at five minutes to nine. At least, I supposed him to be the messenger, and I welcomed him warmly. But you may judge of my amazement and dismay when the fellow calmly informed me that it was his intention to overpower me, and to take my place."

"Imagine it, boy! This ruffian—this infernal impostor—faced me in my own private office, and had the audacity to tell me that he meant to lock me in my own strong-room, and to sit in my own chair! He would then receive the diamonds from the real messenger—who, naturally, would mistake him for me. Is it not the most outrageous trick you ever heard of?"

I couldn't help smiling, and I couldn't help being interested. Van Dusen had persisted in his efforts, and I couldn't stop him. And now, not unnaturally, I took notice of his words.

"It was certainly rather neat, Mr. Van Dusen," I remarked. "The very audacity of the thing was startling, and yet it was so simple. You didn't know Bryant by sight, and Bryant didn't know you. As a consequence, you mistook the first arrival for Bryant, and Bryant mistook the impostor for you. Rather involved, but it's really clear enough. Yes, decidedly neat."

"Neat!" screamed Mr. Van Dusen. "How—how can you stand there and remain so calm, boy! This vile trick succeeded—do you understand? The confounded rascal got away with those diamonds, after locking me in my own strong-room for the whole night!"

"You must have spent quite a pleasant time," I observed calmly.

"The man who undertook that scheme was the most astounding individual I have ever met during the whole course of my experience," said the diamond merchant deliberately. "I am telling you the truth, Tinker, when I say that I produced a loaded revolver and fired before he could stop me. I think I must be mad! But I will swear to you that my bullet had no effect—absolutely no effect! The fellow's arm was pierced—a hole clean through the fleshy part. Yet he laughed, and took no further notice."

"Didn't he feel any pain?" I asked quickly.

"He did not even wince," said Van Dusen. "And before I could fire another shot he came round the desk, and pulled me out of my chair as though I weighed no more than a baby. I am big—I am heavy—but this man lifted me clean from the floor and bore me, struggling vainly, to the couch. And the whole time he remained amusedly calm."

By this time I was greatly impressed, and I came to a decision.

"Before you say anything further, Mr. Van Dusen, I must leave you for a moment," I said briskly. "Please excuse me."

I dodged quickly out of the room, and a moment later I was facing Sexton Blake, who was still sitting at the breakfast-table, sipping his final cup of coffee, and smoking a cigarette.

"You got rid of the brute, young 'un?" he smiled.

"No; he's still there, guv'nor—"

"Still there!" exclaimed Blake angrily.

"Upon my soul!"

"But I think you ought to see him, guv'nor," I went on, grabbing the guv'nor's arm. "He's been robbed of fifty thousand quid—"

"I don't care if he's been robbed of two millions!"

"But listen, guv'nor," I persisted hurriedly. "The man who robbed him was shot through the arm, and he took no notice of it. He lifted Van Dusen out of his chair without any apparent effort, and remained as calm as ice the whole time. Great Scott, guv'nor, there's only one man who could have done it!"

Sexton Blake's manner changed.

"Rupert Waldo," he said slowly. "Waldo—the Wonder-man!"

"Of course, guv'nor; I guessed it at once," I said. "Don't you think we ought to look into the matter? We don't care a fig for Van Dusen and his rotten diamonds. But it's one of Waldo's jobs, and that makes a terrific difference."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"You are right, Tinker," he said crisply.

"I was about to suggest that you should take Pedro into the consulting-room, in order to give Mr. Van Dusen a fright. But if Waldo is mixed up in this crime, I shall investigate. Not because I am anxious to help Van Dusen—I don't care a straw for him—but because I am certainly anxious to lay my hands on the audacious Mr. Waldo."

I could quite understand the guv'nor's attitude. We had already had two exciting tussles with the amazing individual who called himself the Wonder-Man. Waldo had been billed under that name when he was a strong man in a circus. And it was a name which fitted him to perfection.

For Waldo was more than wonderful; he was the most astounding character we had ever encountered. Wild, impossible as it seems, Waldo had no sense of feeling. Cuts, burns, and bruises were nothing to him—we had proved that. And his strength was simply staggering.

Twice Sexton Blake had captured him, and twice he had escaped. He had stated his intention of doing great things in the future, and it seemed to me that this big diamond robbery was Waldo's first coup.

"You'll see Van Dusen, guv'nor?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, Tinker."

"Good!" I said. "If we can only get on Waldo's track I shall be happy. I've no personal animosity towards the fellow—he's rather likeable in some ways. But this is a matter of prestige, guv'nor. Waldo has set his wits against yours, and it's up to you to show him that he's your inferior."

"I am not sure that he is, Tinker," said Sexton Blake grimly. "Waldo is really the most interesting enemy I've ever had to deal with, and certainly the most accomplished. He has the great advantage of his physical abnormalities, and they enable him to elude the police. Yes, I will certainly get on his track again if it can be done—even at the cost of interviewing Mr. Walter van Dusen."

And the guv'nor, tossing his cigarette-end into the fire, walked briskly across the room, and a few moments later he was facing the diamond merchant. Van Dusen came forward with outstretched hand, but Blake ignored it.

"I wish to tell you at once, Mr. Van Dusen, that if I help you it will be because I am interested in the criminal who victimised you," he said coldly. "I will do my best to recover your diamonds, but I tell you frankly that my main object will be to effect the capture of the thief."

The diamond merchant flushed with excitement.

"I want you to do your best, Mr. Blake," he said eagerly. "I was sure that you would help me if only you heard my story. Has this young man told you what happened last night?"

"Only briefly," replied the guv'nor. "I should like you to repeat the story."

Van Dusen did so, and there is no necessity for me to set it down again. When he reached the point where I had interrupted him to hurry in to Sexton Blake, he paused.

"That is as far as I got with my story, Mr. Blake," he said, mopping his brow. "That is, Tinker knows no more than you now. That infernal rogue lifted me like a baby, and carried me to the couch."

"But surely you struggled?" asked the guv'nor. "You are big, Mr. Van Dusen, and I should imagine that you are strong—"

"I am strong," interrupted the diamond

merchant. "But my strength was simply nothing; I was like a child in that fellow's arms. When I attempted to cry out he simply forced a cushion over my face, and within five minutes I was bound hand and foot, and gagged—utterly helpless. Was it not appalling?"

I think the guv'nor was rather amused, for I observed a slight twinkle in his eye. It did not pain us to hear of Mr. Van Dusen's troubles. I was rather sorry, in fact, that Waldo had not treated him more drastically.

"I should like to have a few more details regarding your position at nine o'clock last night, Mr. Van Dusen," said Sexton Blake. "You were alone in your office before the impostor arrived. But was there nobody in the outer office?"

"Not a soul. My clerks went home at six."

"But there are other offices near by—"

"No, Mr. Blake," interrupted the diamond merchant. "I am unusually private and well protected—which, as you will agree, is highly necessary in a business such as mine. Unfortunately, in this case, my seclusion was a misfortune, since the thief had everything his own way."

"Did nobody hear your revolver-shot?"

"Not that I am aware of," was the reply.

"There is nothing astonishing in that fact, however. The window of my office overlooks a wide yard, with nothing but other offices on every hand. All were deserted at that hour. And a revolver, after all, does not create a very loud explosion."

"I understand that you were locked in your own strong-room?" asked Blake.

Mr. Van Dusen breathed hard.

"The most frightful indignity I have ever suffered!" he exclaimed, clenching his fat fists. "What a night I had, Mr. Blake—what a ghastly night! I was bundled into the strong-room, and the door was closed upon me! And I knew that those diamonds were being stolen, although I could do nothing to avert the disaster!"

"The thief, no doubt, relieved you of your keys, and so forth?"

"He took everything, hang him!"

"How the dickens could you breathe all night in the strong-room?" I asked.

"It is not an airtight safe," replied Van Dusen. "I had ample ventilation, although the cold was intense. And there I remained, freezing and helpless, until this morning. One of my clerks heard my hammerings, and opened the door."

"How?"

"My keys had been left on the desk."

"And what was the first thing you did?" asked Sexton Blake.

"I knew that Bryant, the messenger, was to have stayed at a quiet hotel in Holborn, and I immediately rang up that hotel," said the diamond merchant. "Bryant was there, and he came round at once. The fellow was amazed and scared out of his wits. He had delivered the diamonds to the impostor, never dreaming for a moment that anything was wrong. He had left in a good humour, being relieved at having got rid of his precious burden."

"Is Bryant absolutely reliable?"

"My dear sir, you need not suspect him of being implicated!" declared Van Dusen. "Bryant is absolutely innocent. He was duped in exactly the same manner as I was duped. He arrived at my office, and found a gentleman there—a gentleman who introduced himself as Mr. Walter van Dusen. What reason was there for Bryant to suspect trickery? Everything was so straightforward—so simple. He delivered his bag of diamonds, and left. I do not blame the man in the least."

"You could hardly do so, Mr. Van Dusen, seeing that you were just as completely bluffed earlier," said Sexton Blake drily. "The thief, I understand, succeeded in getting away? What about the police?"

"I have already given information," replied the diamond merchant. "Yes, Mr. Blake, the diamonds have gone—fifty thousand pounds' worth! Unless they are recovered I shall be ruined—utterly ruined!"

"Really, Mr. Van Dusen?" smiled Sexton Blake. "I fancy you are exaggerating—although it is none of my business. And it really seems to me that the police will be able to trace the audacious rascal."

"Possibly—possibly!" said Van Dusen quickly. "But the police are slow, Mr. Blake—they dilly-dally so much with their regulations and red tape. You are an independent investigator—you strike at the root of things. And I ask you fervently to help me in this terribly grave matter."

Sexton Blake stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"My fee," he said, "will be one thousand pounds."

"It is not for me to haggle over such a matter," said the diamond merchant slowly. "I thought, perhaps, that your fee— But no matter. If you recover my diamonds, Mr. Blake, you will fully earn the sum you mention."

"My fee will be one thousand pounds, irrespective of whether I recover the diamonds," said the gov'nor smoothly. "I want you to understand that quite clearly, Mr. Van Dusen. I will commence no investigation until you have handed me your cheque."

Van Dusen stared—and so did I, for that matter.

"But—but this is not your usual—er—procedure, Mr. Blake?" asked Van Dusen.

"No," replied Sexton Blake, "it is not. But in this instance a fancy has taken hold of me to name my terms in advance. You may take them or leave them, Mr. Van Dusen. Hand me your cheque, and I will accompany you back to your office at once. I guarantee no result, but I'll do my best."

Van Dusen hesitated a moment, and then jerked out his cheque-book.

"I always thought your methods were different, Mr. Blake," he said coldly. "However, I need your help, and I suppose I must pay for it. But it does not seem to me to be quite businesslike."

He sat down at the desk, and commenced filling in the cheque.

"No," replied the gov'nor, glancing over his shoulder; "do not make it payable to me, Mr. Van Dusen. That cheque will be sent without delay to St. Bute's Hospital for Cripples. It is not my wish to profit over this little investigation."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Blake!" snapped the diamond merchant.

I looked at the gov'nor and grinned, for now I completely understood. And I also realised why Van Dusen had spoken so shortly. The fat old rogue knew well enough that Sexton Blake would not accept his money. The gov'nor's fee was really nothing more nor less than an order for Van Dusen to contribute one thousand pounds to a charity. It was probably the first donation of that character he had ever made.

"Thank you, Mr. Van Dusen!" said Sexton Blake, taking the cheque, glancing at it, and slipping it into an envelope. "We will post this as we go."

Five minutes later we were bowling down Baker Street in a taxi, en route for Hatton Garden. Our mission was not entirely for the benefit of Mr. Walter van Dusen, although, having accepted that fee, Sexton Blake would be obliged to fulfil his obligation.

Our chief motive, however, was to get on the trail of Waldo, the Wonder-Man. Whether we should do so or not was something of a problem, for Rupert Waldo was perhaps the most slippery customer we had ever had to deal with.

And this case was to prove no exception.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Clue of the Return Mail.

THE neatness of Waldo's coup commanded my admiration.

We knew what an audacious beggar he was, but this affair took my breath away. Waldo had bluffed through the whole game, and had carried it through without a hitch, without the slightest difficulty.

Obviously, Waldo had prepared his ground beforehand. In order to bring off such a daring game of bluff he must necessarily have had inside information—that is to say, he was well aware of Mr. Walter van Dusen's arrangements.

And so our old enemy had walked into the diamond merchant's office, coolly professing to be Bryant, the messenger. Having gained admittance, he just as coolly dealt with Van Dusen, and then took his victim's place. I don't suppose there was any impersonation whatever with regard to likeness. Bryant had never seen the diamond merchant, and it was only natural that he should accept Waldo as the genuine article.

Such a scheme could only have been carried out by sheer, unadulterated cheek. A cautious criminal would never have essayed it. But Rupert Waldo was utterly reckless, and I don't reckon he would have cared much if his bluff had been discovered early in the game. He would certainly have escaped.

But, owing to its very audacity, it had succeeded. He had disappeared with a consignment of diamonds worth fifty thousand. What was more, those diamonds could easily be dis-

posed of without fear of them being identified. They were uncut, and Van Dusen had not even seen them; neither, for that matter, had Bryant.

Waldo had had the whole night to make a clean "get-away," and I must acknowledge that I did not entertain many hopes of success. We were not only hours late on the scene of the robbery, but I had good reason to know that Waldo was a difficult gentleman to deal with. He was as cunning as a fox, and kept his head under all circumstances.

Of course, we had no definite evidence—visible evidence—that Waldo was the culprit. At the same time, neither Sexton Blake nor I had the slightest doubt. This affair could have been accomplished by no other man. Any normal individual would have crumpled up after being shot through the arm. And this thief had, on the contrary, been unaffected, and had dealt with the fleshy Van Dusen with astounding ease. Waldo was certainly the culprit.

The description of him supplied by our client tallied perfectly in all essential matters; the man had been medium-sized, slim, and agile. Not a picture of a strong man, I will admit, but Waldo was different from all others.

Arriving in Hatton Garden, our taxi pulled up before a wide doorway, on both sides of which were several highly-polished brass plates. One of these brass plates simply read: "Mr. Walter van Dusen. First Floor."

We entered, Van Dusen leading the way, and mounted a flight of wide stairs. On the first landing we were confronted by two glass-topped doors, one bearing the word "Private," and the other our client's name again, with an invitation beneath it to walk in.

We did so, and found ourselves in the outer office. Two clerks were at work, and I glanced round with interest. The office was strictly businesslike, and exceedingly well appointed. The furniture and effects, in fact, were luxurious. Mr. Van Dusen believed in good appearances.

"There's a gentleman in the waiting-room, sir," said one of the clerks.

"Oh!" exclaimed Van Dusen. "Did he give his name or card?"

"Yes, sir. He is Mr. Lennard."

This conveyed very little to Van Dusen, but Sexton Blake and I smiled at one another. For we knew that the visitor was no less a person than Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard—a very old friend of ours, by the way.

We passed down a superbly-carpeted corridor—after learning that Lennard had been waiting for five minutes only—and Van Dusen opened the door of the ante-room. He peered into the apartment over the tops of his glasses.

"I must beg of you to excuse me this morning, sir," he said. "I am extremely busy, and would like you to call—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the chief-inspector. "I take it that you are Mr. Van Dusen, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the idea of asking me to excuse you— Why, hello, Blake! I didn't see you out in the passage. And Tinker, too! Trust you to be on the scene when there's something big doing."

Van Dusen suddenly snapped his fingers.

"Why, of course! How absurd of me!" he exclaimed. "You are probably an official from Scotland Yard, Mr. Lennard?"

"A chief-inspector of detectives," replied our friend, bowing. "I may as well add, Mr. Van Dusen, that my time is not entirely valueless, and I have been waiting here for nearly ten minutes."

"I am sorry, the fault is mine completely," said the diamond merchant. "I hoped to be back much earlier, but it required great persuasion on my part to get Mr. Sexton Blake to investigate this shocking robbery."

"Oh, I see," said Lennard. "I'm glad you succeeded, Mr. Van Dusen. I don't want to run down the official organisation, but I will say that with Mr. Blake on the spot your chance of getting your diamonds back are at least doubled."

"Flattery, gov'nor," I grinned. "Don't take any notice of him."

"I don't, Tinker," smiled Sexton Blake. The chief-inspector sighed.

"What's the good of trying to pay compliments?" he asked. "Strictly speaking, Blake, I ought to resent your being here—that's the official attitude towards a private investigator. But we know one another, don't we?"

"I hope so," said the gov'nor drily.

"Then we might as well get busy," said Lennard. "I can see that Mr. Van Dusen is vastly impatient, and I'm not surprised. I don't think I should care to lose fifty thousand pounds before breakfast; it would rather spoil my appetite."

"There's no fear of that with you, inspector," I grinned. "I'll bet you wish you had fifty thousand to lose!"

"I wish I had fifty thousand to keep!" said Lennard grimly.

"Really, gentlemen, this is hardly the time for such frivolous talk!" said Van Dusen testily. "Please follow me into my private office."

He strode down the corridor, and Lennard glanced at the gov'nor and winked.

"Not your type of client, is he?" he whispered.

"No," murmured Blake. "It is the type of criminal I am interested in, Lennard. I think I know who engineered this little affair."

Lennard stared.

"The devil you do!" he ejaculated. "But you haven't investigated yet."

"I have heard Van Dusen's story."

"Wait until I have got the details," said the inspector. "I might be able to guess things, too. It's a bit rotten when the official representative of Scotland Yard knows less than a mere amateur."

"Another striking compliment, Tinker!" chuckled Sexton Blake.

"Oh, we know what he means, gov'nor," I said. "Mr. Lennard's quite harmless."

We followed Van Dusen into his private office, which had been locked up, empty, during the diamond merchant's absence. Lennard looked round him searchingly as he stood just inside the door.

"Anybody been in here since the robbery, sir?" he asked.

"Only my chief clerk and myself," was the reply. "I was locked in the strong-room all night, and Hartley, my clerk, released me. But I left at once, and Hartley came with me. Nothing has been disturbed."

"Just tell me all the details, please," said the chief-inspector.

And while Sexton Blake and I were looking round, Van Dusen told Lennard the main facts in brief. While we were thus engaged Bryant arrived. Bryant was the man who had brought the diamonds from South Africa.

One glance at him was sufficient to convince us that he had had no hand in the burglary. He had been duped just as Van Dusen himself had been duped. His statement was clear and concise.

"I arrived soon after nine last night, sir," he said, while the chief-inspector took down the shorthand notes. "I found the outer staircase empty and deserted, but there was a light behind the door marked 'Private.' I rang the bell, and Mr. Van Dusen at once came to the door—"

"I did nothing of the sort!" interrupted Van Dusen sourly.

"What I mean to say, sir, is that I took the man to be you," replied Bryant. "I had never seen you, and when the gentleman came and told me that he was Mr. Walter van Dusen, what else was I to think? He was in your private office, addressed me by name, and instructed me to follow him down the passage to this office."

"Of course, you accepted the man as Mr. Van Dusen, naturally," said Lennard.

"Well, what, then?"

"Why, sir, I simply delivered the bag of diamonds, according to my orders, and obtained a receipt," said Bryant.

"The thing was a forgery, and useless!" snapped Van Dusen.

"It might not be useless," said Lennard.

"Can I see it?"

The diamond merchant handed over a slip of paper.

"I got it from Bryant this morning," he explained. "There's no clue in that paper, inspector. It's a sheet of my own paper, and was typed on this machine here. The signature is a mere forgery, and only faintly resembles my own. I suppose the rascal roughly copied my own writing from a letter which lay upon the desk."

Lennard was examining the receipt, and he shook his head.

"Quite right," he grunted. "This is no good, Blake. I thought it was all written. There's no writing to be identified; even our experts at the Yard would be able to make nothing of this."

He turned to Van Dusen.

"You say you wounded the criminal?" he asked. "Was there any blood?"

"A good deal," replied the diamond merchant. "I thought the fellow was badly

hurt, but he didn't seem to care a jot. Good gracious! The man was positively ghastly. He fingered his wound until I winced at the sight of it, and yet he seemed to feel no pain. He bound a duster round his arm—

"Is it still here?" asked Lennard sharply. "Yes; I think he threw it into the waste-paper-basket."

The inspector strode across the room, and rummaged in the basket. After a moment he gingerly held up an office duster, ominously bloodstained. This he placed upon a large sheet of paper, and wrapped it up carefully.

"May come in useful," he remarked. "That semi-dried blood would take fingerprints nicely, and our experts will probably discover quite a lot—What are you shaking your head about, Blake?"

Sexton Blake smiled. "I think you will find, Lennard, that the thief was not so incautious as to finger that duster with his bare hands," he replied. "A man wearing gloves does not leave many finger-prints behind him."

"That's right; be cheerful," said the inspector. "Just when I was beginning to get some hope, too. Well, Mr. Van Dusen, you can rely upon us doing everything in our power as quickly as possible."

"But I want something done at once—at once," said Van Dusen hoarsely.

"If you've got the idea that we shall succeed—"

"No, I have no such idea," interrupted Van Dusen. "You will use your own methods, Inspector Lennard. I base all my hopes on the activities of Mr. Sexton Blake."

"I am flattered," said the chief-inspector gravely.

I grinned, and the gov'nor looked as solemn as an owl. He seemed to be engaged in examining the large blotting-pad which adorned Mr. Van Dusen's luxurious desk. He removed the top sheet of paper, and took it across to a mirror, and held it there for a moment.

"Do you know anything about this, Mr. Van Dusen?" he asked.

The diamond merchant went to Blake's side quickly, and then caught his breath in. "No!" he declared. "I did not write that, Mr. Blake! Upon my soul! The man evidently wrote a note after he had obtained the diamonds, and very incautiously blotted the sheet while the ink was still wet."

The chief-inspector and I went over to the mirror. There was quite an amount of ink-marks upon the sheet of blotting-paper, but several words stood out far more clearly than the rest, and this is what I saw:

"O.K. Meet me at 37, Milton Street, Bristol, to-morrow."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Lennard eagerly. "You've hit it, Blake! The thief must have written that message in order to post it when he went out. Why, if we're sharp, we might be able to get him—"

"I shouldn't count too much on it, Lennard," interrupted Sexton Blake, shaking his head. "This blotted message is rather too readable."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it has every appearance of being a fake," replied the gov'nor. "Can you imagine a calm, collected individual, such as this man proved himself to be, making a blunder of this kind? Can you imagine it, Lennard? It's too transparent; it's too obviously a fake."

"Perhaps you are right," grunted the inspector. "Now I come to look at it squarely, I can see that the rascal chose the clearest portion of the whole sheet. He seems to have quite a pretty sense of humour. And, by the way, who is he? I thought you said you knew?"

"Don't you know?" smiled Sexton Blake.

"I know that he's a confoundedly impudent rascal," said the inspector. "And he seems to be pretty callous, too. That yarn about his messing about with the bullet-wound—Why, good lord! You—you don't mean Waldo?"

"Who else?" said Blake. "Who else could have carried out the project so successfully after being severely wounded? Who else could have carried Mr. Van Dusen bodily across the room?"

Lennard gazed meditatively at Van Dusen's ample figure.

"No, the fellow must have been infernally strong," he admitted. "But if we're up against Waldo, Blake, we're in for a warm time. Twice we've had that brute, and twice

he's escaped. It's a poor look-out for Mr. Van Dusen's diamonds if Waldo has got them."

"Waldo got away with a lot of gold once, Mr. Lennard, and you were hopelessly at sea," I remarked thoughtfully. "But he didn't keep that gold, did he? The gov'nor saw to that all right!"

"And Mr. Blake will see to this, too!" declared Van Dusen. "I have the most profound faith in you, Mr. Blake. Should I have come to you otherwise? I approached you because I knew that you would succeed—"

"I am sorry for that, Mr. Van Dusen, because I am by no means certain," interrupted the gov'nor quietly. "And I should just like to point out that if any result is to be achieved, I must insist upon being left undisturbed to make my investigations. I don't want to offend you, but interruptions are tiresome."

The diamond merchant nodded.

"Your hint is a strong one, Mr. Blake," he said shortly.

And, without another word, he left the office, taking Bryant with him.

Detective-Inspector Lennard was folding up the sheet of blotting-paper, in readiness to stow away. I grinned at him.

"What's that for?" I asked. "There's no need to identify the writing, Mr. Lennard. We know jolly well that Waldo is the man! And you can bet your boots that Waldo knows that we shall suspect him! He doesn't care, anyhow."

"My job is to collect all the evidence, whether it's important or unimportant," replied the inspector. "There's no telling what little thing might be of value later on. But I must admit that I'm fairly stumped here. There seems to be nothing to get hold of."

"Except the bloodstained duster," said Sexton Blake. "And you needn't be greedy with it, Lennard."

"Greedy?"

"Can't you manage to tear a piece off for me?" asked the gov'nor. "I should like a small portion to examine at my leisure."

The chief-inspector stroked his chin doubtfully.

"I don't know whether I can manage it, Blake," he replied. "I don't object personally, you may be sure; but I'm not my own master. If the Yard people get to know that I've parted with a piece of the duster, there'll be trouble. We fellows are supposed to hang on to everything."

"I know that," said Blake. "But you don't always do what you're supposed to do, old man. I'll accept all responsibility—"

"Oh, nonsense!" interrupted Lennard. "Here you are!"

He brought out the package, and carefully tore off about a third of the duster. It was one with ragged edges, so there was nothing to show that a portion of it was missing.

"Keep it dark!" he said confidentially.

We knew well enough why our official friend was so careful. His superiors would not take the same view of the matter as he did. And, strictly speaking, he was exceeding his orders in parting with any single article.

"Thanks, Lennard!" said Sexton Blake. "I hope it may be useful, that's all."

The gov'nor stowed the piece of duster away, and then commenced a minute examination of the room. Lennard excused himself, for he found it necessary to communicate with the Yard at once.

After he had gone, Sexton Blake and I had the office to ourselves for a time. And, although we spent a full half-hour, we found nothing of importance. The gov'nor was apparently interested in a time-table, which lay open upon a shelf—a Bradshaw's Railway Guide.

"That's queer, gov'nor," I remarked, after a while. "Just when you're looking at that time-table I come across a giddy railway-ticket!"

Sexton Blake twirled round.

"Where did you find it?" he asked sharply.

"Just against the fender, gov'nor, half tucked under the rug," I replied. "I suppose it was dropped by Van Dusen. Do you know if he lives at Purley?"

"Mr. Van Dusen does not live at Purley, young 'un," replied Blake. "This ticket bears yesterday's date—and this is a return half—from London Bridge to Purley. Just glance at this time-table: it is now open at the same page as it was when I first looked at it."

I glanced at the time-table with interest.

The trains set forth on that page were those running between London Bridge and Coulsdon—and other stations of a semi-local character in Surrey. Purley, of course, was on that route.

"Rather significant, gov'nor," I remarked.

"It is highly significant, Tinker," said Blake grimly. "We know that Waldo had a bit of a struggle with Van Dusen, and it is by no means improbable to assume that this ticket fell from his pocket in the course of the exercise. Having completed his work, Waldo looked up a train, and took his departure."

"But we're no better off even now," I objected. "What's the good of knowing that Waldo went to Purley—even supposing that he did? It's not a very big station, I know, but we couldn't possibly trace him—"

"You are forgetting the portion of duster, Tinker," interrupted Blake.

I stared in amazement.

"What's that got to do with it, gov'nor?" I asked.

"You are also forgetting Pedro," Blake reminded me.

And then I jumped.

"You—you mean that Pedro might be able to pick up the trail from Purley, gov'nor?" I asked eagerly. "By jingo, that's a stunning ideal! With that blood on the duster, Pedro ought to be able to sniff the scent in a moment, although it will be rather old by the time we get on the scene."

"Pedro, I am confident, will be capable of the task," said Sexton Blake. "But we must not count our chickens before they're hatched, Tinker. It is, after all, only a chance shot."

"What about Lennard?" I asked. "Will you tell him?"

"I have no intention of waiting until the worthy inspector returns, so we can't tell him," replied the gov'nor. "If we meet with any success, however, I shall lose no time in acquainting Lennard of the facts."

Less than half an hour later we were back at Baker Street. It was still comparatively early in the afternoon, and we found Pedro in the middle of his morning nap.

"Rouse yourself, you slumbering lubber!" I said briskly.

Pedro was not inclined to do so, possibly believing that I was only chaffing him. He soon learned differently, for a leash was affixed to his collar, and then we started off.

We took a taxi to Victoria, and thence travelled by the Brighton Railway to Purley. Sexton Blake preferred this to motor-car because we might possibly be led across country by Pedro, and a car would be an encumbrance.

Pedro was not required for service until we were outside the station. There were very few people about, and the day was fine and clear. By all appearances we should have quite a pleasant time—if the clue was of any value.

But for the moment we were rather anxious. The chances were about even. There was every likelihood that we should draw a blank; and it is not a pleasant sensation to know that one has travelled a considerable distance on a fool's errand.

"Now, Pedro," said the gov'nor, patting the old dog's head, "you've got to do your best!"

The bloodstained portion of duster was held down for Pedro's inspection. He didn't pay much attention to it visually, but his nose was quite busy. He knew well enough what was required of him, and, without receiving any instructions, he commenced scouting round with his nose to the ground.

For at least ten minutes his efforts were in vain. We went this way and that way, and back on our tracks, and goodness knows where. All to no purpose. Pedro was unsuccessful.

"Looks like a frost, gov'nor!" I said gloomily.

"Not necessarily, Tinker," said Blake. "We can't expect Pedro to pick up the trail until he finds it. And we haven't covered a quarter of the ground yet."

"But Waldo must have come out through the booking-office, gov'nor."

"That is by no means certain," was the gov'nor's reply. "But, in any case, the point is of no importance, since we could not expect the trail to be traceable after this morning's foot traffic. We must go farther afield."

I had practically no hope—which only shows that it's a silly thing to get despondent before there is sufficient cause. For, less than three minutes later, Pedro changed his attitude completely.

He became more eager, more intense, and his back fairly bristled. He cast round several

times, barked, and then set off at a loping trot down the road, quite close to the hedge. "He's got it, gov'nor!" I ejaculated delightedly.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Cunning of Rupert Waldo.

SEXTON BLAKE was looking very pleased. This wasn't very surprising, for we had got on the track with far more ease than we had reason to anticipate. It had been a chance shot, and it had proved true. There was no telling where the adventure would lead us.

"I wonder what will come of this, gov'nor?" I remarked, as we strode down a country lane, with high hedges on either side of us.

"You are perfectly at liberty to wonder, Tinker—I don't," said Sexton Blake cheerfully. "There is really no sense in wondering at such a time as this. We might be successful, and we might be led upon a fruitless errand. There is no telling. We can only continue our course."

The gov'nor was quite right. Guessing at things was never a wise course. In nine cases out of ten one always guesses the wrong thing. Besides, conjecture is liable to cause confusion.

So we trudged on, ready for anything.

As it happened, our walk was not to be of very great length. On a lonely stretch of road Pedro suddenly took a fancy to explore the region in the rear of the near-side hedge. At all events, he dived through a gap, and we dived through after him.

"Looks like the end of the trail soon, gov'nor," I observed.

Blake made no reply except to nod, and we found ourselves in a small plantation or spinney, with a glimpse of a meadow beyond. Pedro did not hesitate at all—indeed, he appeared to be more eager than ever now, and went unerringly through the trees and undergrowth.

At the edge of the wood Sexton Blake called a halt.

"We must not be rash, Tinker," he said softly. "Just look ahead between those two trees. There is no footpath beyond—nothing but the meadow, with an old barn in the far corner."

"Do you think that's the end of the trip, gov'nor?"

"I don't know; it might be," replied Blake—"although I should hardly suspect Waldo of acquiring such palatial quarters. However, we shall proceed cautiously now, and refrain from talking."

"Half a tick, gov'nor! Do you call that barn palatial?"

"I'm afraid you don't know when to take me seriously, young 'un!" chuckled Blake. "You surely remember that Waldo is something of a dandy? I was speaking in sarcasm, you young duffer!"

I grunted, and we broke out of cover of the wood, and proceeded across the meadow. Pedro, sure enough, went off in a bee-line towards the barn. We followed him without a word until we were almost in the rear of it. Then, abruptly, Sexton Blake came to a halt.

"I don't believe for a moment that we shall find anything in this old building," he whispered. "But there is just a chance that we shall, Tinker. And it is never a wise thing to make use of all your forces at once. Take Pedro back to the cover of the wood, and wait there. Watch until you see me signal, or until you hear me call."

"But why, gov'nor?"

"I want to have a preliminary look round alone," replied the gov'nor.

I knew it was no good arguing, although I was rather disappointed. And I also knew that there was sound sense in Sexton Blake's decision. Although he did not say so, I think I guessed his actual motive."

There was just a chance that this was a trap—a bare possibility. We didn't want to both walk into it like a couple of boobies. With Pedro and I in reserve, as it were, the position would be much better.

The wisdom of this plan was fully realised later on.

I don't intend to describe what happened to me at this juncture. It will be far better if I relate Sexton Blake's adventure.

He waited until I had taken Pedro out of sight, and then strolled round the angle of the building. It was of stone, without a window of any description. The old tiled roof was in a sad state of repair, and the place was obviously disused.

Blake found a pair of double doors on the

other side. They were closed and padlocked. This was not very promising, for it proved, at all events, that the place was empty. The only window was on this side, and it looked as though it hadn't been opened for years.

"H'm! I am afraid it is a waste of time," Blake told himself.

He approached the door, and fingered the rusty padlock. It almost fell off in his hands, and the ancient iron fastening clattered down. Blake pulled at the door, and it dragged open heavily.

All was darkness within, and the detective threw the door open to its widest extent in order to admit as much light as possible. Then he walked into the place, and looked round him.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Blake! Delighted to see you!"

Even as the words were being uttered Sexton Blake was seized from behind. For once he was taken by surprise. Half prepared as he was for trickery, he had not been ready for that sudden attack.

The grip which encircled him was appalling, and he almost winced with pain. Strong, agile, and nimble, he struggled fiercely to obtain the mastery. He might just as well have struggled with a wild gorilla.

His assailant bore him to the ground, and within a minute his ankles were secured. This was quite sufficient as a temporary measure. And in the dim light of the barn Blake saw the figure of Waldo, the Wonder-Man.

Waldo was himself—that is, he wore no disguise. He was immaculately attired, spruce, and appeared to be highly amused. In spite of his enormous strength, he was no bigger than the average size, and his somewhat refined-looking face was clean-shaven.

"Alone—eh?" he remarked smoothly.

"Yes. I made a mistake—" Blake paused, and bit his lip.

"In sending Tinker back with Pedro?" said Waldo. "You might as well say it, Blake. Yes, it was certainly a blunder, because I should have had rather a job with the three of you. And I have really no desire whatever to inconvenience the excellent Tinker. I shall not trouble about him now."

Sexton Blake made no reply. He wanted to give Waldo the impression that I had left the scene completely, and it seemed that he had succeeded. The gov'nor's feelings, I need not add, were very bitter.

He had hoped to capture Waldo—and Waldo had captured him. The only consolation was that Pedro and I were fairly close at hand. As things had turned out, it would have been better had we all entered the barn at once. But Blake had acted for the best, and Fate is rather apt to play mean tricks of that sort.

"You are looking as well as ever, Blake," said Waldo lightly.

"We need not discuss the state of my health, Waldo," replied Sexton Blake. "You have got the better of me for the moment. Well, what is the meaning of it? Let us discuss the things that matter."

"Just what I expected you to say, Blake," observed Waldo, producing his cigarette-case. "Try one of these—No? I can assure you they are quite safe. I am not a drug fiend."

He selected a cigarette for himself, lit it, and regarded Blake smilingly. Then he bent down and secured the ropes more tightly, and added some more to Blake's arms.

"I have no real fear of your getting away, Blake," he explained, "but it is just as well to be on the safe side. Galling, isn't it, to be handled like a mere child? That's the advantage of strength."

It may be thought that Sexton Blake had not put up a very good fight. He had. But it was futile to attempt any struggle with Waldo. The man's strength was staggering. I believe he could have pulled a tramcar along the road as easily as a boy pulls a tradesman's truck.

"Naturally, you are furious with yourself for having been tricked," said Waldo. "I am sorry, Blake, that I was compelled to do it. But what do you think of my little coup? Not a bad haul, was it?"

"It was a haul such as you will never obtain again, Waldo," replied Blake grimly. "And I shouldn't be too confident now. Scotland Yard is hot on your track—"

"My dear man, Scotland Yard does not worry me in the least," interrupted Waldo. "It was you who I got into a funk about. That's not a compliment; it is simply a statement of fact. I didn't feel safe while you were at liberty. By the way, did the police spot my little blotting-pad idea?"

Sexton Blake smiled in spite of himself.

"No; I spotted it," he replied.

"You weren't deceived?"

"Not at all."

"I thought you wouldn't be," said the astounding criminal. "That's why I prepared that other faked evidence—the return half and the open time-table. The fact is, Blake, I was fairly sure that you would get on the track by means of Pedro and the duster."

"You prepared everything in order to hood-wink me?"

"Exactly!" smiled Waldo. "You see, I figured the whole thing out as I thought it would happen, or as it might happen. You would investigate, and you would find that duster. You would come to Purley, and put Pedro on the trail. Quite a good line of reasoning, wasn't it? I took the precaution this morning to walk up and down the road towards the station. I thought it only fair that Pedro should have every chance."

"Upon my soul, Waldo, you are an amazing fellow!" said Sexton Blake. "I should be furious, but I'm not. I don't think I have ever met a criminal with a sense of humour like yours. Why don't you throw up this game—"

"With the police after me?" interrupted Waldo. "No, Blake; it's not good enough. I've got to keep on now, and I shall do so. These quarters are not my usual ones, by the way. And that window, although it looks sealed up with age, opens quite easily. That's why you thought the place was empty, being padlocked on the outside."

"I fail to see any object in explaining so much to me," said Blake quietly. "You didn't get me here for the sake of a chat, Waldo. You mean mischief, and I should like to know what it is."

Waldo nodded.

"I am very much afraid, my dear Blake, that you will soon be forced to undergo a very distasteful experience," he said. "I robbed Walter van Dusen, and I consider that I have performed an action in the service of the country. I dare say you know Van Dusen better than I do. Scotland Yard regards me as a scoundrel, but I am a saint compared to that Hatton Garden reptile."

"You draw his character fairly accurately," said Blake drily.

"I am glad you agree with me," smiled Waldo. "Honestly, Blake, there is keen pleasure in knowing that you have robbed such a man. To plunder the property of a decent citizen troubles one's conscience, but I laugh when I think of Van Dusen. And now that you have stepped into my little trap, my last worry has vanished."

"You are optimistic," said Blake. "Your worries, Waldo, will be many. I am not the only detective in the world; there are others who have ability of a higher quality than mine."

"That's just your modesty!" chuckled Waldo. "I know differently. And I want you to thoroughly understand that I have no quarrel with you. You are my natural enemy, but that is all. Personally, I admire you very much indeed, Blake, and I have no intention of harming you."

"That, at all events, is gratifying!" commented Blake.

"It would be far simpler for me to kill you at once," went on Waldo. "But that would be ghastly. To kill a man you like, Blake, would be to cause an injury to the community at large. I am not sarcastic; please don't think so. Rather than injure you, I prefer to go to much trouble and expense. All I want to be certain about is that you will be placed in such a position that you will be powerless to injure my own plans. It will be necessary, therefore, for you to indulge in a protracted sea-voyage. During your absence I shall be able to complete my own plans in England, and when you return I shall be beyond your reach."

Sexton Blake laughed lightly.

"An excellent programme," he said. "But how will you carry it out?"

As a matter of fact, Blake was by no means easy in mind, although he pretended to be careless. He was satisfied that Waldo would do him no injury, but he knew the Wonder-Man fairly well. Waldo was capable, he was cunning, and when he embarked upon a scheme he carried it through. Sexton Blake's position was serious, and he knew it. But he could scarcely help marvelling at this astounding rogue's attitude towards him. There was an element of real honesty in Waldo's conversation, in spite of his crookedness.

"How will I carry it out?" repeated Blake's captor. "I will tell you, since there is no harm in your knowing. The whole scheme is cut and dried. It is with great regret that I shall find it necessary to administer a little

harmless drug, almost at once. It is merely a dose to put you to sleep, and will be quite harmless."

"As harmless as your prepared cigarettes?" "That's infernally unkind!" protested Waldo. "I don't lie to you, Blake. You can always be sure of that. Somehow, it isn't possible to lie to a man of your stamp. My cigarettes are harmless, and I have never willingly doped myself with drug in all my life. I shall chloroform you because it is necessary. Then your clothing will be removed, and you will be attired in the rough garb of a sailor. After that you will be conveyed to Tilbury, and shipped on an old sailing schooner which leaves for the Pacific this evening."

"I am to be shanghaied, you mean?" asked Blake grimly.

"You have used the precise word," agreed Waldo. "When you recover you will be far out to sea, and the skipper will not listen to you. You will be a common for'ard hand, and threats and persuasions will be futile. You will not touch land for at least two months, and then— Well, you are at liberty to do as you please then. My own plans will be completed by that time."

Sexton Blake made no comment. He knew that Waldo would carry out his programme, and the prospect was distinctly disconcerting.

But what could be done? How could Sexton Blake improve his position? Unless help came from outside he was doomed to the fate Waldo had outlined. And the gov'nor knew that the only help which could come was from me. And the knowledge that I was comparatively near by cheered him up, and made him almost ready to laugh at the Wonder-Man's plan of action.

"Well, that's all, Blake," went on Waldo. "You remain silent? I'm not surprised, because you must be feeling rather bad. I'm really sorry that such drastic measures are necessary."

Waldo lost no further time. He reached up to a low beam, and the next moment he had grasped Sexton Blake firmly from behind, and was holding a heavy pad of soft cotton material over the detective's mouth and nostrils.

The whole thing was so deliberate, so calm. Blake did not even attempt to struggle, and he was wise. For such action on his part could only result in greater pressure of the pad, and that could easily mean death. The only possible course was to give Waldo his head. When resistance was useless, Sexton Blake was never foolish enough to resist.

And within a couple of minutes the famous detective was totally unconscious. He had attempted to trick Waldo—to retain his wits while pretending to lose them. But the dodge was not practicable, and Blake succumbed.

And after that Waldo worked rapidly. He stripped off Blake's clothing, and attired his unconscious victim in a suit of dirty, rough clothes, which had been bought from an impetuous merchant seaman.

To add to the effect, Waldo soaked Blake's chest and shoulders with neat whisky. He reeked of the spirit, and anybody entering the barn at that time would have been willing to swear that it contained a dead-drunk sailor.

Waldo's plan had been successful—so far.

Would he be successful all through? That was the main question. An early success, without being able to sustain it, was far worse than no success at all. And it must not be supposed that Sexton Blake was beaten.

He wasn't. And I will state quite boldly that I wasn't, either.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Clue of the Sand-writing.

"**F**ED up, that's what I am, Pedro—fed up!"

I growled out the words in a grumbling voice, and Pedro looked up into my face, and wagged his tail in agreement.

Nearly an hour had passed since Pedro and I had been sent back into the wood with instructions to wait. Nothing whatever had occurred to relieve the monotony; there had been no sign of Sexton Blake, and no sign of anybody else.

Several times I had been tempted to go forward, in defiance of orders. But I thought it wiser not to do so. There was no telling

what the gov'nor was doing, and I had no wish to butt in.

It was extremely fortunate that I held myself in check. For, without the slightest doubt, I should have shared Sexton Blake's fate if I had approached that barn. But now I was free, and there was plenty of hope.

But at this time I knew nothing, and I was only wild with the gov'nor for being so thoughtless. He was probably messing about in the vicinity of the barn, making examinations, entirely forgetful of my near presence. That's what I told myself; not without reason, either.

I could tell of instances where Sexton Blake has left me somewhere, with orders to wait, and he has then gone off, forgetting all about me until hours later. This seemed to be a similar case.

What I didn't like was the view of the barn, as seen from my point of vantage. The door wasn't visible, nor the window. I simply gazed at the blank, staring back of it, and could only guess what the other side was like.

When a full hour had elapsed I lost all patience.

"Pedro," I said grimly, "I'm cold and miserable. You stay here, old son, while I do a little scouting. I'm not going to let myself be seen, but I want to find out what the silly game is. Lie quiet, old boy!"

Pedro, who had been squatting on his haunches, flopped himself down obediently, and prepared to wait. He was a wonderful old dog for understanding what was said to him.

I moved away amongst the trees, intending to work completely round the meadow on the other side of the hedge. My idea was to get round so that I could see what was taking place at the front of the barn.

The round-about journey occupied at least ten minutes of time, but I succeeded in my object. My reward, however, was simply disgusting. For I saw nothing but a pair of ancient doors and a window, securely closed. There wasn't a soul in sight, and everything looked deserted.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, glaring. "I can see what's happened. The gov'nor must have found some footprints, or something, near that barn, and he's following 'em up. My hat! I'll say a few sweet things later on!"

And then a look of surprise sprang into my eyes; at least, I suppose it did, for I was very astonished. Quite distinctly I heard the steady beat of a motor-car engine. And it wasn't coming from the direction of the road in my rear; the sound proceeded from some spot beyond the barn, where there was no road at all. Furthermore, it was unmistakably the beat of a stationary engine; the car was not in motion.

What could be the meaning of it? I was puzzled, but there's no reason why anybody else should be. The truth, in fact, was that Waldo had a car concealed in a hollow just behind the barn. He had carried Sexton Blake to this, and was now preparing to depart. If I had made up my mind to go scouting five minutes earlier, I should have seen the gov'nor being carried away.

But I hadn't seen it, and I knew nothing.

The steady hum of the motor-car changed, and increased in volume. Several grinding noises sounded, and I knew that the vehicle was being put into motion. I watched with great interest.

Then I saw a glimpse of the car between two trees, and came to the conclusion that it was making its way down an old farm-track. I wanted to see that car, but I didn't want the occupant of the car to see me.

Some quick reasoning followed.

Once the car was on the road it would probably go towards Purley. If so, I should be able to gain my object. So, without wasting a second, I turned round and scudded towards the wood. Reaching it, I raced amongst the trees, and arrived at the dividing hedge in a breathless state. Just beyond lay the road, and I could see it clearly, although hidden myself.

And I was only just in time, for the car came speeding along as I had anticipated. I stared steadily at the driver, but only caught a mere glimpse of him as he flashed by. He wore a thick muffler, and large goggles, and it was really impossible to form any positive opinion. But I received the firm impression that the man was Rupert Waldo!

The car was a small limousine, and by no means smart. After it had passed me I craned over the hedge, and tried to read the number. It was spattered with mud, and half obliterated.

"Rotten!" I grunted.

I had discovered nothing, although I suspected much.

What had that car been doing, concealed behind the old barn? And why had the blinds been drawn? Why, furthermore, had the driver been wearing goggles when there was no dust upon the roads, and the car was fitted with a wind-screen? A small point, perhaps, but a significant one.

For it clearly indicated that the goggles and the muffler were intended as a kind of disguise. The drawn blinds suggested that there was something within the car which required to be concealed from view.

I was very anxious and worried, for I feared that Sexton Blake had met with some misadventure. It had been a trick, after all, and the gov'nor had fallen into the trap. It was another of Waldo's cunning games.

This, of course, was a conjecture, but it was based on fairly strong evidence. And now I considered that it would be absurd for me to wait any longer. The only course was to approach the barn and investigate.

And the best way of doing so, I concluded, was to hurry down the road and find out exactly where the motor-car had emerged from, and then follow its tracks. There was something fishy about the whole business.

Before starting, however, I turned and gave a soft whistle. Within a minute Pedro was by my side, and then we both set off together. As I had suspected, the car had entered the road from an old waggon-track which skirted a ploughed field. At one time of day the track had led to the barn, but both had fallen into disuse.

I wasted a few minutes in examining the tracks. Except for the fact that the car had been fitted with studded front tyres, I learned nothing. And I hastened on, and presently found myself in a small hollow.

The car had been driven twenty or thirty yards past the barn, and then turned. And here it had stood motionless for some time, as I could see by the deeply-impressed marks on the ground.

The spot seemed to be utterly deserted, and my alarm increased. However, I kept my wits about me, and acted with caution. And I received some comfort from the thought that Sexton Blake might not have been trapped, after all.

It was just possible that he had spotted Waldo as he was about to leave, and had concealed himself in the car. At all events, there was no sense in getting into a stew until I had sufficient reason.

Finding nothing in the hollow, I turned my attention to the barn. The door was closed and padlocked, and I scouted round for a few moments before approaching. At last, convinced that I was alone with Pedro, I boldly walked up to the door.

The padlock was not secured, and I easily pulled the rusty thing away from the fastening. Then I dragged the door open, and peered into the barn, ready for any trouble. But none came. The place was empty.

"This is a queer affair, Pedro," I said grimly.

Over in one corner lay some odds and ends of rope. It was knotted in places, but had been slashed through in several other places. And as I looked at it I instinctively knew what that rope had been used for.

Somebody had been bound, and the rope had been afterwards cut. Then, as I wandered round the ramshackle building, I became aware of a somewhat curious odour in the atmosphere.

"Whisky," I told myself. "Whisky and cigarette-smoke—and something else. What the dickens can it be? The whole odour sort of suggests a chemist's shop. By jingo! I'll bet a quid it's chloroform!"

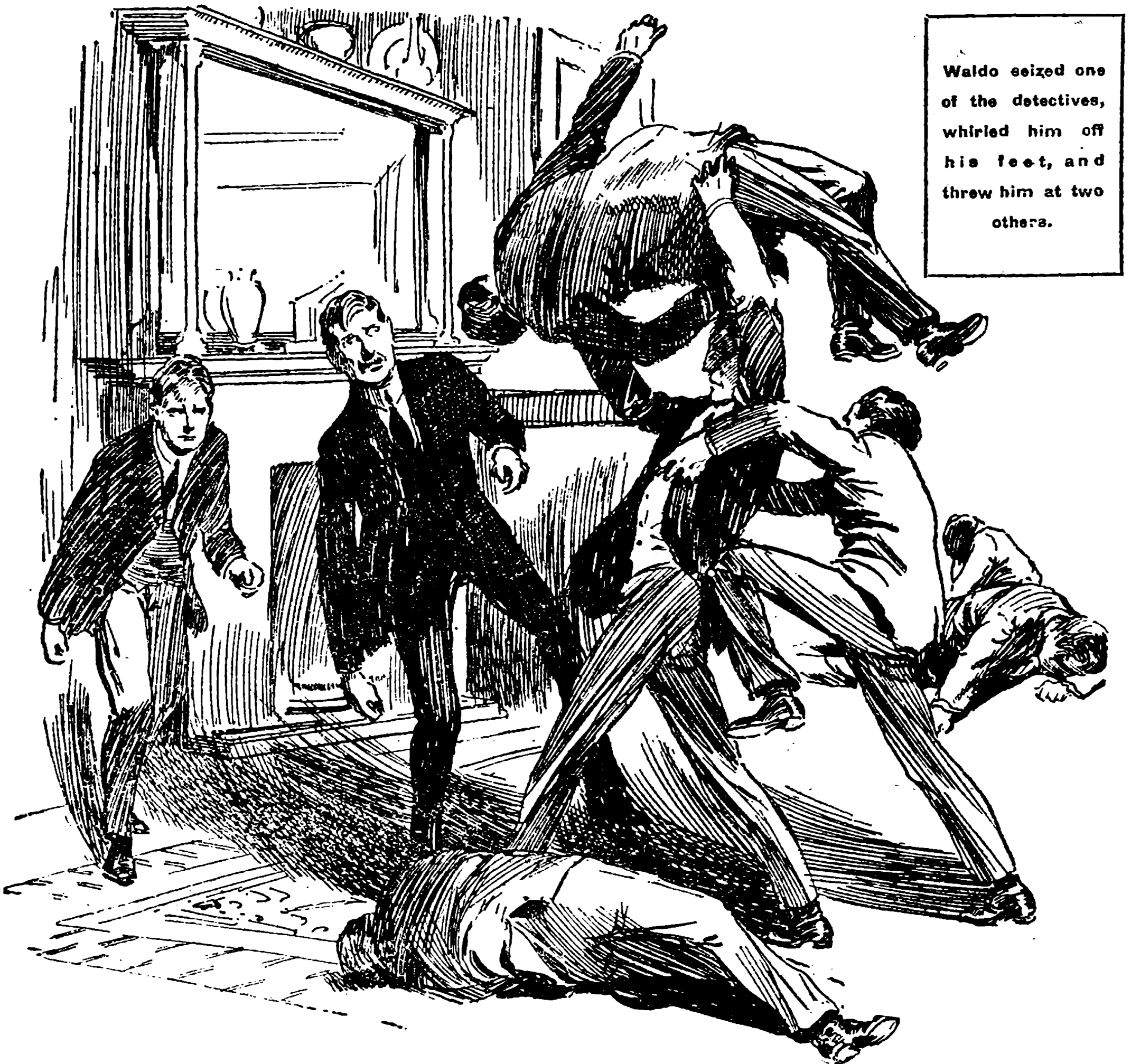
The thought startled me more than ever. The scent—the drug scent—appeared to be stronger in one place than in others, and for several minutes I endeavoured to ascertain the cause.

And at last I met with success. There was a low beam just above my head, and the air seemed to smell stronger of drug at that spot than anywhere else. I grasped the beam and hauled myself up.

Then I dropped, uttering an ejaculation.

A soaked pad, or something, must have been placed on that beam in readiness. It was as clear as daylight to me. Sexton Blake had entered the barn, and had been jumped on from behind—and doped!

I didn't worry myself about the whisky, although I found several portions of the floor which reeked of the spirit. The main fact was that Sexton Blake had met with foul



Waldo seized one of the detectives, whirled him off his feet, and threw him at two others.

play, and had been taken away in the motor-car.

How could I help him? How could I get on his trail? I had been unable to see the number of the motor-car, and to track it was as good as impossible. Even if I had taken the number the position would not have been improved. For the car would certainly reach its destination before it could be traced.

"We're done, Pedro—absolutely done!" I exclaimed bitterly. "Why the dickens didn't the gov'nor let me go with him? Not that that would have been any good, I suppose. We should both have been collared, then."

Pedro looked round at me, and raised his ears intelligently. There was an eager light in his eyes, and he sniffed at the floor noisily, giving all his attention to one particular spot. The floor was of sandy earth, and perfectly dry.

"Found something, old man?" I asked.

I crossed over to his side, and then I realised that that spot was where Sexton Blake had been lying. The impressions in the dry earth were unmistakable. The gov'nor must have been propped with his back against the wall.

And then I noticed something else which made me jump.

"Clear out of the way, Pedro!" I roared. "Mind your clumsy feet—"

I gave him a terrific push, rolling him over. He picked himself up, looking rather astonished and pained. But there was an excellent reason for my action. There, in the soft earth, I saw some writing! And Pedro's front paws had been perilously

near to it. A slight movement on his part would have obliterated several letters.

I crouched on my knees and fished out my electric-torch. A strong light was needed for a job like this. The written words were simply traced in the sand, as a child sometimes writes on the seashore with a grubby finger.

And the presence of that writing there was exceedingly significant. For it was close against the spot where Sexton Blake had been lying. Only the gov'nor, therefore, could be responsible.

And why should he trace words in the sand—except as a message to me? A secret message, performed without the knowledge of the enemy. I judged that Sexton Blake must have used the only means in his power to give me a slight clue as to his fate. But there was no sense in guessing.

I stared at the floor eagerly and anxiously.

And what I saw was this: "T-L—RY DO—S." Just that, and nothing more. There were two words, and seven letters were quite plain. The others were blurry and unreadable—at least, at first glance.

"Now, what the thunder can this mean, Pedro?" I asked. "There's no sense to be made out of those words. What does 'Do—s' stand for? By jingo! That letter before the s looks like a k—it is a k, too! That makes it into 'Do-ka.' Docks! What a silly ass I was not to see it before!"

I stared with renewed excitement at the two words.

"Tilbury Docks!" I shouted. "It can't mean anything else!"

The second word had given me the clue. And now that I knew the truth, I easily

recognised the blurred marks as the required letters. Without the slightest doubt, the message left for me was "Tilbury Docks."

Sexton Blake must have learned from Waldo that he was to be taken to Tilbury, and that was where the car was bound for. It was very smart of Sexton Blake to take that action, for I could not have got on his track by any other means.

And Tilbury Docks suggested something else to me. Why the docks? Obviously because Waldo had made arrangements for Sexton Blake to be taken on board a ship. The whole thing was becoming quite clear to me.

Waldo had told us once before that he would never harm Sexton Blake. And so, in order to get rid of the gov'nor, he had adopted this course. I was eager and excited—and extremely worried.

Before I could reach Tilbury the ship might have sailed. It was necessary for me to act without a second's delay. And so, after only a brief glance round to make sure that I had missed nothing, I hastened away.

When Pedro and I arrived at the station we discovered—naturally—that there was no train for thirty-five minutes. Our only course was to wait. Pedro was contented enough, and he flopped himself down for a quiet nap. But I paced the platform impatiently and angrily. Why the dickens couldn't the trains run more frequently?

To make matters worse, this train was late, and I reviled the engine-driver, the entire railway staff, and the whole system.

And then the train proved to be a slow one, and by the time I reached London

Bridge I was nearly exploding. I lost no time in getting to Fenchurch Street, and here again I received another check. The next train for Tilbury left in seventy minutes.

"Oh, it's no good, Pedro!" I grunted. "Fate's against us to-day. I'd go by car, but that wouldn't be so quick as the beastly train. The best thing we can do is to go and find some grub!"

On second thoughts I decided to jump into a taxi and take Pedro home. He would be useless to me at Tilbury, I decided. For Sexton Blake had been carried on board the ship—that was obvious. Besides, Pedro's very presence there would give the game away, if Waldo happened to be watching. And then I should find trouble on my own account, instead of finding the guv'nor. Pedro had his uses, but he was a hindrance sometimes.

Therefore he was taken home, and I managed to get some food into me, and pocketed all that I had no time to consume. I simply cleared the luncheon-table at a sweep. Then I hastened away.

Mrs. Bardell had informed me that Chief-Detective-Inspector Lennard had called, and that he was going to call again. So I left a brief message, saying that we were very busy, and would see Lennard later.

I managed to catch the train just comfortably. It was now fairly late in the afternoon, and long before Tilbury was reached darkness had set in. I had no fixed plan in mind as to how I should set to work, but one of the first things was to get down to the docks.

I knew very well that my task was a difficult one, and that the odds were against my achieving any result. It would probably be necessary for me to pursue my inquiries for hours on end before I received even a faint inkling.

It was just as well that I had come prepared in that way. For hours did pass. I went from dock to dock, making casual inquiries of all sorts of people—dock labourers, seamen, Customs' officers, and goodness knows whom else.

But I learned nothing—nothing whatever. I was weary, tired, and filled with intense worry. What had become of Sexton Blake? Why was it that I could learn nothing? Why had he left me that message in the old barn if it meant nothing?

The only solution which offered itself was that the guv'nor had been mistaken; he had not been taken to Tilbury Docks at all, but somewhere quite different. I had lost all hope of gaining any success now.

I wandered aimlessly about, and found myself gazing across the wide river in the direction of Gravesend, just opposite. In fact, I was looking at the ferry as it crossed from port to port.

"Looking for somebody, young man?"

I turned round, and found myself confronting an elderly individual in a greasy peaked cap and a reefer coat. A pipe protruded from beneath his grizzled moustache, and he looked at me somewhat curiously.

"No; it's all right, thanks," I said shortly.

"Mebbe you don't know as this quay is privit," went on the old fellow. "I thought you was waitin' for somebody, perhaps—"

"Look here," I interrupted. "As a matter of fact, I'm anxious to find out what has happened to a man named Mr. Blake. I think he's been here to-day—a tall gentleman, clean-shaven, dressed in blue serge, with a Melton overcoat."

My companion shook his head.

"That description ain't very complete, young un," he said. "I've seen many a gent dressed like you describe. I'd help ye if I could—"

"Well, can you tell me if anything of a

suspicious nature has occurred?" I asked. "The fact is, I'm afraid that Mr. Blake met with some misfortune. I believe he's been taken away on a ship, against his will."

The old man removed his pipe. "I s'pose this ain't a yarn you're tellin'?" he asked suspiciously.

"No. I'm half worried out of my wits," I replied. "Mr. Blake was probably brought here during the afternoon, and it's quite possible that he was carried on board the ship. If you can give me any information, I'll pay you well for it."

"I don't want no payin'," said my companion. "Bill Edwards—that's me—ain't the kind o' man to take advantage of a young feller like you. Besides, I don't reckon I can help ye."

"I didn't think you could," I said dully.

"No, there's been nothin' suspicious that I knows of," went on Mr. Edwards, puffing at his pipe again. "The only ship what's left the dock this arternoon was the old Cornish Coast, a reg'lar old windjammer."

"Sailing ship?"

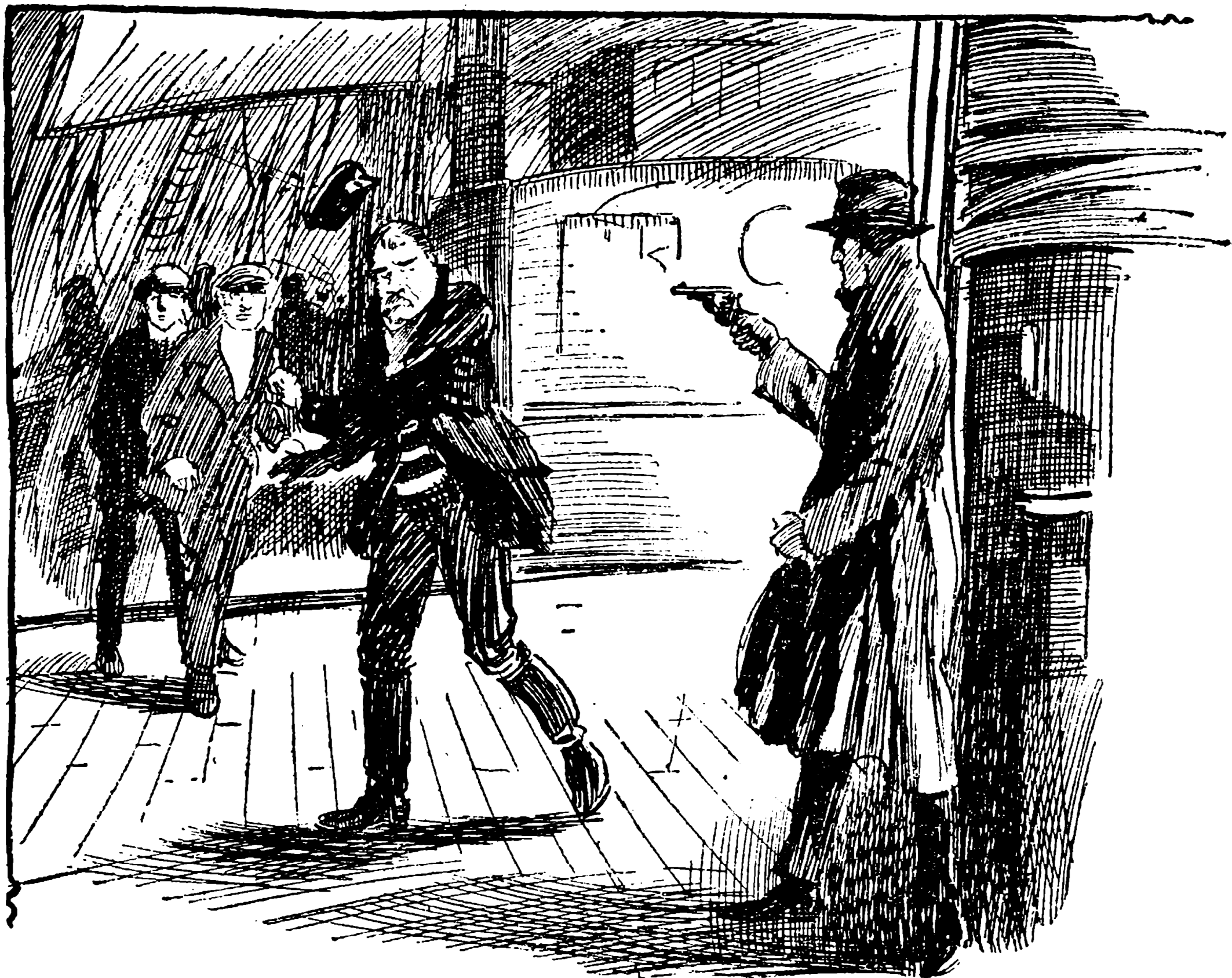
"A schooner, skippered by old Cap'n Brent," replied Mr. Edwards. "I ain't no friend o' Cap'n Brent, let me tell ye. I reckon he's one o' the wust shipmasters I ever set eyes on—a fair brute. An' his crew is jest about the thickest scum he could sign on. Decent sailormen won't sail with him."

"Yes, I suppose there are a few rotters about," I said, without interest.

"The Cornish Coast sailed for the Pacific this arternoon," went on my informant.

"About four blokes went on half soused at the last minute. Why, one feller was carried aboard, he was that drunk."

I suddenly had a vision of that old barn: I again smelt the odour of whisky and drug. Whisky! And here was an old



Nelson Lee's first shot pierced Brent's cap, the second bullet struck the bowl of the captain's pipe, and the third whistled past his ear within a hair's-breadth.

schooner, bound for the Pacific, with one sailor so drunk that he had been carried on board at the last moment! And Captain Brent was a well-known brute. Everything fitted in, and my interest was acute.

"Did you see that man carried on board?" I asked quickly.

"Ay, I did!"

"Who carried him?"

"The fus-mate and the cook, so far as I recollect."

"And how was the drunken man dressed?"

"Why, you young shaver, that feller wasn't the gent you're inquiring after, if that's what you mean!" said Mr. Edwards, shaking his head. "He was a rough sailorman, dressed in rough clothes—"

"Did you see his face?"

"Yes; clean-shaven he was, with dark hair," said my companion. "An' now you come to ask the question, I kind o' remember wonderin' why the bloke's face looked so refined and fresh. It struck me at the time that he seemed to be more dopey than drunk. But mebbe I was mistook. There's all sorts amongst sailors."

"But I knew very well that Mr. Edwards had not been 'mistook.' The whole sequence of events was too conclusive to admit of any doubt. Sexton Blake had been brought to this dock, and he had been carried on board the schooner, Cornish Coast. There were several questions which needed answers, however.

"Look here, Mr. Edwards," I said earnestly. "I'm pretty sure that the man you saw was the gentleman I want. He's been shanghaied."

"Gosh!" said the old man staring.

"And I want to find out all I can," I went on putting a pound-note into my companion's hand. "No; please take it, Mr. Edwards! Can you remember if Captain Brent had a civilian on board when he sailed—a land-lubber, I mean?"

The old fellow scratched his head.

"Not when the old hooker sailed," he replied. "There was a feller come aboard with the cap'n about two hours afore, and they went down into the cabin. The feller looked a real gent, and I reckon he must have come off a motor-car, seein' that he wore some o' them goggle things on his cap."

"By George!" I exclaimed. "Did—did you see a motor-car?"

"There was one come along during the artemoon," replied Mr. Edwards. "I believe Cap'n Brent came down from London in it, too. Still, I can't be certain o' that, 'cos I never saw it meself. But old Bob Adams was fair took up about it. He couldn't understand a scallywag like Cap'n Brent using a motor-car."

"And this stranger you saw with the captain?" I asked. "I suppose he went ashore before the schooner sailed?"

"Yes."

"Was he on board when the drunken sailor was carried over the gangway?"

"Yes; an' he laughed fit to bust," said Mr. Edwards.

If I had the slightest doubt previously, I had none now. After all my fruitless efforts, I had come across this old fellow by sheer accident; and he had been able to supply me with the very information I had needed. I took him to be one of those gentry who appear to spend their lives in lounging about the quayside, doing nothing. And he had witnessed everything that mattered.

"When did the schooner sail?" I asked quickly.

"About four o'clock this artemoon."

"And what is her first port of call?"

Mr. Edwards grinned.

"I reckon that'll be somewhere on the other side of the Horn," he replied. "The schooner sails for the Pacific, an' she don't call nowhere. I reckon that'll be eight weeks afore—"

"But she goes down the Channel?" I asked.

"I reckon so," said the old man, nodding.

"She'll be well started by now, young gent. There's a decent wind blowin', and the Cornish Coast is a fair goer, although she is old!"

I put several more questions to Mr. Edwards, and elicited the information that the owners of the Cornish Coast had offices in Gravesend. This was good enough for me, and I hurried away with all speed.

By a piece of luck I caught the ferry just as it was about to leave, and half an hour later I was at the shipping-office. Naturally, it was closed; but the clerk lived on the premises, and I learned from him the approximate position of the Cornish Coast.

at that hour, and where it would be by midnight.

I could do nothing further. If I told my story, and made a demand that the schooner should be stopped, I should be laughed at. I had no proof whatever, and the owners of the Cornish Coast would do nothing.

The old ship was not installed with wireless, and there was no means of communicating with her. Drastic action was necessary, and I needed help. Alone, I couldn't see how I could manage things.

The time was now close upon eight o'clock, and one item of information I had learned was that the Cornish Coast was due to pass Calistowe, between eleven and twelve. And that very name gave me hope.

For Calistowe, on the Sussex coast, was within three miles of St. Frank's College. And at St. Frank's resided my old friends Nelson Lee and Nipper. They, of all people in the world, would be able to help.

Sexton Blake had to be rescued, and I didn't know how it could be managed. But Nelson Lee would probably be able to suggest a plan. The first move, therefore, was to get to St. Frank's.

The trains were hopeless, and so I turned my thoughts in another direction. I obtained a fast motor-cycle from a big garage, and was soon speeding away into the night. The journey would not take very long, and I hoped to arrive at the famous public school before bed-time.

That ride was one of the most reckless I had ever indulged in. All I wanted was to get more speed out of the machine. I had forgotten Van Dusen's diamonds; I had forgotten Waldo, the Wonder-Man.

All I remembered was that my beloved guv'nor needed help.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Nelson Lee Means Business.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST yawned.

"Nearly time for bed, dear fellows," he observed languidly. "Watson, old boy, I wish you wouldn't make up the fire so fiercely at this late hour! Just think of the frightful amount of coal you are wastin'!"

Tommy Watson grunted.

"And just think of the frightful amount of coal Government departments are wasting!" he said. "It makes me wild, for people to talk about coal economy when the Government never practises what it preaches!"

"My dear ass," remarked Nipper, looking up from a book, "for goodness' sake don't start jawing about politics! Handforth was arguing with Church and McClure half an hour ago, and about five black eyes are the result. We don't want a free fight in this study, even if Handforth likes 'em in his!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Watson. "I don't see why I can't speak freely."

The scene was Study C in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and bed-time was drawing near. Supper was already over, and Nipper and his chums were enjoying a few minutes relaxation before retiring for the night. "As for the coal," went on Watson.

"I don't see why—" interrupted Sir Montie.

"What's the noise, old boy?"

"Oh, don't interrupt—"

"Sounds like a motor-bike!" Nipper exclaimed, throwing his book aside, and going to the window. "I wonder who can be arriving at this hour? The gates were locked long ago."

He pulled the curtain aside, raised the lower sash, and leaned out of the window. The old Triangle was dark, but a glaring light shone from the direction of the gates. Nipper dimly saw the figure of Warren, the school porter, opening the gates.

"Thanks!" came a clear voice.

Nipper started.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed. "I could swear that was Tinker's voice, you chaps. You know Tinker—Sexton Blake's assistant, and one of my best pals? But it can't be Tinker, really."

In order to make quite sure, Nipper hurried out of Study C, followed by his two chums. They raced down the passage, through the lobby of the Ancient House, and emerged into the Triangle.

The motor-cyclist—which, of course, was me—was just pushing his machine against the steps. I kicked down the stand, and

jerked the bike back. Then I turned my attention to the three fellows who had just emerged.

"Who's that?" came Nipper's excited inquiry.

"Me!" I replied ungrammatically.

"Tinker!" roared Nipper, rushing at me. "I thought I was dreaming when I heard your voice at the gates. What the dickens—"

"This is a rippin' surprise, begad!" said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and eyeing me beamingly. "Just a friendly call, I suppose, dear boy?"

"No," I replied grimly. "There's big trouble, and I've come here to obtain help. Don't tell me that your guv'nor is away, Nipper—"

"He's not," Nipper interrupted. "Mr. Lee's in his study."

"Thank goodness for that!" I said. "Look here, take me along to Mr. Lee at once! I'll explain there. You can all come, if you like, but don't tell the rest of the fellows."

"You'd better come round to the private door," said Nipper briskly.

"One moment, dear old boy!" said Tregellis-West. "I don't think Tommy an' I ought to come—"

"What?" said Watson tartly.

"I really don't think we ought to go, Tommy boy," said Sir Montie languidly. "Mr. Lee is one of the best, but it ain't fair to take advantage of him. An' in a matter of business like this we should be in the way. Besides, it's nearly bed-time."

"Oh, all right!" growled Watson.

I could see that they didn't exactly care for the idea of being left out in the cold; but Tregellis-West was quite right. I liked the pair of them well enough, but just at present I was so filled with anxiety concerning the guv'nor that I wanted to see Nelson Lee alone—except, of course, for Nipper. Tregellis-West and Watson were schoolboys, and this business was no light affair.

"Decent of your chums!" I remarked, as we hurried to the private door. "Still, I'm glad they're not coming. There's grim work to be done, Nipper. We shall probably be up half the night, and there'll be excitement."

"Just what I was wanting!" said Nipper promptly.

We entered the doorway, and less than a minute later Nipper was ushering me into Nelson Lee's study. The famous Gray's Inn Road detective seemed quite at home in his position of Housemaster at St. Frank's.

"Why, this is a surprise, Tinker!" he said cordially, rising from his chair and taking my hand. "I heard a motor-cycle a few minutes ago, but I did not connect it with such an interesting person as yourself. Is Mr. Blake here?"

"No, sir," I replied grimly.

"Sit down, Tinker, and tell me the reason for this impromptu visit," said Nelson Lee, regarding me steadily. "I can see that you are greatly worried, and that you have been travelling furiously."

"The guv'nor's been kidnapped, sir!" I exclaimed tensely. "He's been taken on board a ship, and I don't know how we can rescue him—"

"Now, Tinker, it is not your way to make outbursts of this kind," said Nelson Lee gently. "Your master has met with trouble. Well, we will discuss the matter calmly, and see what can be done."

"Rather, sir!" put in Nipper. "We'll help all we can."

"Do you remember that fellow Waldo, sir?" I asked.

"I am hardly likely to forget him, my boy," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It is some time ago since that affair happened at Bannington. But I know Waldo to be a most amazing individual. His strength is astounding, and the police were unable to keep him in custody. You are implying, I presume, that Waldo is connected with this present affair?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "Just listen."

And, as briefly as possible, I told Nelson Lee and Nipper of the theft of Van Dusen's diamonds; I told them how we had investigated, and how we had travelled to Purley on the trail. Then I concluded with an account of my own investigations.

"A very shrewd line of reasoning, Tinker," said Lee at length. "You are fully justified in taking it for granted that Mr. Blake is on the Cornish Coast as a forward hand. If he is to be rescued we must lose no time."

"But how can it be done, sir? That's the question!" I exclaimed. "The ship is an old schooner, and she is bound straight for the Pacific, and doesn't call anywhere. And she's got no wireless, either."

"Couldn't you send a wireless to another ship or the naval authorities and have her stopped?" asked Nipper.

"My dear boy, you overlook the fact that we have no proof," put in Nelson Lee. "We can't expect the police to act on the somewhat vague information which is in our possession."

"But it's not vague, sir!" protested Nipper.

"Not to us, I will agree. But the police would hesitate to take any drastic action," said his master. "Not only that, but I doubt if the police have the power to help us. The schooner is no longer in port, and Captain Brent is master on his own ship. When at sea he is lord of all he surveys, and can give his orders as he chooses."

"Then—then we're helpless, sir?" I asked.

"So far as obtaining official assistance is concerned—yes," replied Nelson Lee. "But there is another way, Tinker. We can use force."

"How, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"I don't quite know for the moment. We must consider the position carefully," replied the schoolmaster detective. "Captain Brent, we may be sure, will refuse to give Mr. Blake up; he will not admit, even, that Blake is anything but a common seaman. The skipper will not listen to reason—because he has been paid by Waldo. He has contracted to take your master to the Pacific. And when we remember the rich haul that Waldo made, we can safely assume that Brent has been well paid. He will carry out his instructions—if he can."

"Couldn't he be bribed—"

"My dear Nipper, I would have nothing to do with that sort of thing!" interrupted Lee. "You are only thinking of Mr. Blake's safety. But I intend to rescue him and get the better of this rascally skipper."

"But how can you on the high seas, sir?" protested Nipper. "Dash it all! We can't defy Brent on his own ship!"

"His officers and crew would probably back him up, sir," I put in.

"I am inclined to agree with you, Tinker," said Lee quietly. "At the same time, if we only act boldly enough we shall win. To begin with, we will try to reason with the man. If that fails the only other method is force. And I think that just we three must undertake the trip alone; we want no outsiders in the affair."

"But how are we going to reach the ship, sir?" I asked. "It seems to be rather too big—"

"You are naturally filled with doubt, Tinker," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Well, I'm not surprised at that. The task, however, will be fairly simple, I think. Waldo obtained those diamonds from Van Dusen by a piece of consummate audacity. There is no reason why we should not try audacity, too."

"The ship is due to pass Caistowe in an hour or two," I said anxiously.

"Which leaves us ample time to make our preparations," nodded Nelson Lee. "I am acquainted with a man at Caistowe who owns a very powerful motor-boat, and I am quite sure that he will give us the use of it for to-night. That is the only preparation which need be made, in fact. Our movements after we reach the schooner must be dictated by the circumstances."

Nelson Lee was a man of action, and he at once pulled the telephone towards him and got into communication with the owner of the motor-boat. He learned that the little vessel needed supplies of petrol and oil, but that it was in perfect running trim. It would be ready for sea at eleven o'clock precisely.

"And is Mr. Fielding coming with us, sir?" asked Nipper, when Lee had finished.

"No, my boy," was the reply. "Didn't you hear me say that I will explain my reasons for requiring the boat to-morrow? It will be rather a risky undertaking, and I am not at all sure that I ought to allow you to come—"

"Oh, chuck it, sir!"

"We could, of course, take two or three policemen with us," went on Lee. "But of what use would they be? And I don't think the local inspector would allow them to go, in any case. It is far better to have the thing done quietly."

"You're right, sir," I agreed. "But can we do it?"

"We shall see, Tinker!" replied Nelson Lee grimly.

The sea was very calm, and the motor-boat sped across the smooth surface swiftly and easily. The twinkling lights of Caistowe were behind us, and all was dark ahead. And somewhere on that mass of water the Cornish Coast was gliding lazily along under her patched canvas.

Everything had gone smoothly.

We had arrived at Caistowe to find Mr. Fielding there with the motor-boat, and we had started off without any delay. Nipper was supposed to be in bed at this hour, of course, but this was a very exceptional occasion.

"Rather rotten that poor old Montle and Tommy couldn't come!" said Nipper regretfully, as he and I squatted in the bows. "But in a case like this they would be in the way, I suppose."

"Not only that; but the game is risky," I said. "It wouldn't be fair to their people to take them on a perilous adventure. With you it's different, old chap. You're accustomed to this sort of thing—and so am I."

"Well, let's hope we shall succeed!" said Nipper fervently.

The motor-boat proceeded steadily on its course, and although we sighted several steamers, we saw nothing of the schooner. It was starlight, and a waning moon was shining. The night, indeed, could not have been better suited to our purpose.

It was well after midnight before we met with success. And then we sighted a sailing vessel with the unmistakable rig of a schooner. There was no telling that it was the Cornish Coast, but we bore down upon it.

And at length we were near enough to the stern, having gone round in a wide circle, for the night-glasses to be brought into play. And as we drew nearer and nearer I distinctly read the words painted on her stern:

"Cornish Coast, London."

"She's the ship, sir!" I said quickly.

"So I observe, Tinker," said Nelson Lee, who was also using glasses. "Now, my boys, you must keep your wits about you. I intend to sweep alongside and board the vessel."

"And what about us, sir?"

"You will remain on this boat, and keep her running parallel, at the same speed as the schooner," said Lee. "Keep just clear, and hold yourselves ready to draw in alongside when you get the signal. I can trust you to manage this little craft with skill."

"But what about you, sir? You can't go on board alone!" protested Nipper, in alarm. "Why, you'll be collared at once, and then—"

"You will please allow me to conduct this affair in my own way, Nipper!" broke in Nelson Lee grimly. "You have your orders, and that is sufficient. Leave the rest to me."

I took the wheel, and Nipper placed himself at the controls. The engine had already been reversed, and we were heading straight towards the starboard side of the sailing ship. Nelson Lee held himself ready to leap on board.

Owing to the calmness of the sea I managed the thing beautifully, and we went right alongside, and only bumped once, and then lightly. Nelson Lee gave a leap upwards, and grasped a festoon of ropes.

The next minute he had climbed up as nimbly as a monkey, and was standing on deck. It was a daring move, and I was filled with doubts as to what the result would be. The motor-boat, meanwhile, drew slightly away, and Nipper kept the engine running slowly, so that we maintained the same amount of speed.

But it is my intention to relate what occurred to Nelson Lee.

As he leapt to the deck there was a shout from several voices, and the detective found himself confronted by three or four rough deckhands. Then an officer came hurrying forward.

"Who the blazes are you?" shouted this gentleman coarsely.

"I want to see the captain at once—Captain Brent," replied Nelson Lee.

"How did you get on this ship?" demanded the officer.

"I just came aboard from a motor-boat, sir," said one of the sailors.

The officer—who was probably the second "greaser"—strode to the side, and stared at the motor-boat for a moment as it skimmed smoothly along less than three fathoms away.

"Well, I'm durned!" exclaimed the man, in astonishment. "Rum way of payin' a call, isn't it? You can't see the skipper now—"

"I think I can," interrupted Lee. "Please fetch him at once."

And then a shout came from for'ard.

"By Jove! Is that you, Lee?" roared a well-known voice. "Good man! I don't know how you managed—"

"Get below, you scum!" bellowed the officer, rushing along the deck, and swearing frightfully. "Here, Jackson—Binns—Hirst! Take this fellow below, and keep his mouth shut!"

Nelson Lee hurried forward. Sexton Blake

was there—Sexton Blake attired in rough seafaring garb, and looking grotesque. And before he could advance any distance he was seized by several sailors and held secure. The situation was rather dramatic, and was made more so by the arrival of Captain Brent.

"What's all this blessed commotion?" he bellowed.

"This sailor again, sir," said the officer. "It was a mistake to sign the swab on; he thinks he's a dook, or something! An' now this fool has just come aboard from a motor-boat, demanding to see you."

The skipper, a big, hulking brute, swore foully.

"Hold that man tight!" he shouted. "Take him below, and put him in irons!"

"One moment!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "That gentleman is Mr. Sexton Blake, and I have come here to demand his instant release."

"You 'old your lip, darn you!" snarled the skipper. "Take him below, men! Look lively, you lazy 'ounds!"

Sexton Blake, struggling fiercely, was forced below. Just a minute before, and he would have been able to leap overboard into the motor-boat without difficulty. Now the position looked rather serious.

"You are very foolish, Captain Brent," said Lee grimly. "I do not intend to leave this vessel until I take my friend with me. I know well enough that you have been paid to take him away from England—"

"Git off my ship!" thundered Captain Brent furiously. "I'll do what I like on my own craft, and I don't take no orders from nobody! Understand? Git off while you're safe, and thank your stars you ain't man-handled!"

"I will go when Mr. Blake comes with me," said Lee quietly.

"Mister Blake—Mister Blake!" roared the skipper. "That man's a for'ard hand, and he'll know what's what afore this voyage is over! I give you just one minute to get back to your blamed cockleshell!"

Nelson Lee stood his ground squarely.

"And I give you just one minute to hand over my friend," he retorted.

The captain swore, and turned on his heel.

"Here, you lazin' dogs, chuck this thing overside!" he roared. "Look lively! An' you needn't be careful about handlin' him!"

Half a dozen men advanced, and things looked grave. The men were rough, brutal fellows, and Lee looked very slim and easy to deal with.

"Just one moment," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

He held something lightly in his fingers. "This little article is a fully-loaded revolver," he went on. "I assure you, Captain Brent, that I shall use it if my orders are not carried out. Stand back, you idiots! I am in earnest!"

The men backed away hastily.

"You white-livered scum!" bawled the skipper. "The fool won't shoot—he daren't! Git hold of him—"

"I repeat that I am in earnest!" interrupted Lee evenly.

Brent swore.

"You can't shoot!" he raved. "I defy you—"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Nelson Lee, realising the necessity of teaching this blustering bully a lesson, gave a display of marksmanship which scared the skipper out of his wits. As an exhibition of revolver shooting that little display would have been hard to beat.

It was all over in five seconds. Lee had seen that the deck was clear in Brent's rear, and he fired harmlessly, without injuring the skipper or anybody else. But his first shot pierced Brent's cap; the second bullet struck the bowl of the captain's pipe, and the third whistled past his ear within a hair's-breadth.

To shoot in that manner so rapidly, and so accurately, it required a steady hand and a nerve of iron. Lee was sure of himself, and he smiled grimly as the skipper's pipe clattered to the deck in pieces. It had been projecting at an angle, and had offered an easy mark.

"Now!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "Do you defy me again, captain?"

"You—you—"

It is really impossible to set down what Captain Brent actually said. Several of his teeth were loose, owing to the jar of the pipe, and he was completely cowed. The next bullet might come nearer!

"I—I don't want no trouble aboard my U. J.—No. 801."

ship!" he snarled. "Git that blighter up from below, and let him clear off. I'll be glad to git rid of him!"

Nelson Lee breathed a short sigh of relief. It had been touch and go, but he had won. Audacity had gained the day. He, alone, had compelled Captain Brent and his men to surrender their prisoner.

It was that revolver display that did the trick. Even if the skipper had remained firm, the men would never have obeyed him. They would rather face their captain's fury than Nelson Lee's unerring aim.

Exactly two minutes later Sexton Blake was on deck. Lee had given the signal, and the motor-boat was close alongside. Blake came over first, and then his rescuer. Lee preferred to keep that revolver ready for action until the last moment.

"Thank goodness, guv'nor!" I gasped fervently.

Nipper jerked open the throttle, the motor roared in response, and we sped away into the night.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

On the Right Trail at Last.

SEXTON BLAKE laughed genially.

"Really, I don't know whom to compliment most—you, Lee, or Tinker!" he exclaimed. "You have both done wonders, and I mustn't leave Nipper out, since, without him, you would have been handicapped."

"I reckon Mr. Lee is a masterpiece, guv'nor!" I exclaimed warmly. "Just fancy him holding up the whole giddy crowd! Defying that rotten skipper to his face! Why, Mr. Lee deserves half a dozen medals!"

"Please don't talk such nonsense, Tinker," chuckled Nelson Lee. "That giddy crowd, as you put it, was composed of the worst types of sailormen. They were ready enough to attack me when they thought I was harmless. But a little firmness in a case like that works marvels."

"It was splendid of you, old man, to risk your life in the way you did," said the guv'nor quietly. "And Tinker has been very cute indeed. The manner in which he traced me to Tilbury, and then to that vessel—"

"Oh, rats, guv'nor!" I broke in. "There was nothing cute about that. You left a message for me in that old barn. Without that I should have been helpless. So where does the cuteness come in?"

Sexton Blake chuckled.

"Well, we will say that we have all done well, then there will be no quarrelling," he smiled. "My own part, however, was an ignoble one. I have been in hot water ever since I fell into Waldo's cunningly-contrived trap."

"Do you feel any bad effects, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Not now, Tinker," he replied. "The sea air has freshened me up wonderfully. I should have been in a fine plight if you had not come to my rescue so promptly. Waldo did well; but his game is spoilt."

We were nearing the little harbour of Caistowe, and we were all feeling very light-hearted. Sexton Blake looked rather queer in his seafaring attire, but it was the guv'nor all right.

His story was very easily told, for it practically amounted to nothing. When he had awakened he found himself in the fore-cabin of the Cornish Coast, and darkness had already descended.

He had been kicked and cuffed about while still semi-dazed, but after that he had confronted the skipper, demanding to be put ashore. Of course, his demand was ignored, and he was treated as an ordinary deck-hand. Left to his own devices, he would probably have escaped in time—but not that night.

And time was of great value in this investigation.

Having arrived at Caistowe, we all climbed into Nelson Lee's car, and returned to St. Frank's. Here Nipper went off to bed at once, and Sexton Blake was supplied with a complete outfit of Nelson Lee's attire, and he looked himself again.

"It is too late for me to give instructions with regard to a bed-room for you," said Lee, when he and the guv'nor entered his study. "But I dare say I can manage to find you a comfortable—"

"My dear Lee, please don't trouble!" interrupted Blake. "Tinker and I are leaving almost at once."

U. J.—No. 591.

"Arc we, guv'nor?" I asked sleepily.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Lee. "I won't permit that, Blake! You must stay the night at St. Frank's."

"Please don't press me, old man," said the guv'nor quietly. "I am worried; for the life of me I don't know how to get on the right trail! But that trail is in London—not here. I mean to start work the very first thing in the morning, and I want to be in town. You quite understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I think I do," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Waldo has thrown down the gauntlet," went on Blake—"he has challenged me. Well, I mean to beat him, yet, if it is humanly possible. I am not particularly anxious to recover those diamonds for Van Dusen, but I am anxious to get the better of that amazing crook."

"And how do you propose to get to London?"

"I am going to summon up enough impudence to ask you to lend me your car," replied the guv'nor, with a smile. "Tinker and I will be home by five o'clock, or a little after, and we can then snatch at least three hours' sleep."

"How ripping!" I yawned. "I'll bet I shall snatch more than three hours, guv'nor! I shall be asleep all the way up in the car!"

"You won't, you lazy young beggar!" said Blake. "You'll have to take your share of driving! I don't believe in encouraging—"

"Oh, all right, guv'nor!" I interrupted. "I'll do my whack."

And fifteen minutes later we were bowling away, having parted cordially with Nelson Lee. He had helped us splendidly, and we were grateful. Without Nelson Lee's aid, indeed, everything would have been ruined.

We arrived home just before five, and tumbled straight into bed, and went to sleep. By eight-thirty we were up again. A bath and a vigorous rubbing-down freshened us up wonderfully, and when we went in to breakfast we looked and felt fresh and ready for anything.

"Surprising what a lot we go through, guv'nor," I remarked as I raised a dish-cover and peeped underneath it. "Oh, topping! Fried soles! All smoking hot, too! Get busy with the serving, guv'nor! I could eat a shark this morning!"

We were soon making those soles disappear at an astonishing rate. Sexton Blake was thoughtful, and he did not even glance at the morning paper. I was rather absent-minded, too.

How were we going to get on the trail? Tilbury? Would it be any good going to the docks, in an effort to trace Waldo? I rather fancied that such a trip would be a mere waste of time.

At last I decided to appeal to the guv'nor.

"What's the programme, guv'nor?" I asked.

"I'm afraid, Tinker, that it is difficult to map one out," he replied. "But I mean to get hold of those diamonds—and I mean to get hold of Waldo. It will be a stiff task, and all the stiffer because we don't know where to start—Well, Mrs. Bardell?"

"There's a gentleman waiting to see you, sir," said the housekeeper, who had entered at that moment. "Wants to see you real urgent, sir."

Sexton Blake frowned.

"For the second morning in succession we have been disturbed at breakfast, Tinker," he observed. "It really won't do! Surely we are permitted to partake of our meals in seclusion? Did the gentleman give his name, Mrs. Bardell?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Brunton."

"Never heard of the merchant," I remarked.

"Please tell Mr. Brunton that I am unable to see him, Mrs. Bardell," said Blake gracefully. "If, however, Mr. Brunton cares to make an appointment by letter, I will probably arrange an interview."

"And he's settled!" I observed, as Mrs. Bardell departed.

But Mr. Brunton wasn't. It was rather a coincidence that this visitor should insist upon seeing the guv'nor during breakfast, exactly as Van Dusen had done the previous morning. Mrs. Bardell reappeared, carrying a written message this time.

"The gentleman asked me to give you this, sir," she said.

Sexton Blake took the envelope with a sigh.

"I wish people would be less troublesome!" he exclaimed irritably.

As he tore the flap open I watched him

with interest. The affair was probably nothing, I decided. He took a card from the envelope, glanced at the name, and then turned it over. For a moment he remained with pursed lips, and finally broke into a smile.

"Please show Mr. Brunton into the consulting-room, Mrs. Bardell," he said. "Tell him that I will be with him in a moment."

The housekeeper departed.

"What about the appointment by letter, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Well, in a way, Mr. Brunton has complied," smiled Blake. "But read this."

I took the card, and read the following short message upon it:

"Please spare me five minutes. I think I can give you some valuable information concerning the Hatton Garden robbery."

I looked up quickly.

"It might be a dodge, guv'nor," I said. "Waldo is a cute customer!"

"Precisely, Tinker," agreed Sexton Blake. "I shall be on my guard, and well prepared for any trickery. You had better come into the consulting-room with me—to act as a kind of guardian. I fear I am incapable of being left alone with Waldo, after my experience of yesterday!"

I grinned, and a few minutes later we entered the consulting-room. We did not really suspect that our visitor would turn out to be Waldo. Mr. Edgar Brunton, as a matter of fact, was a short, thick-set young man, with an expression upon his face of resigned misfortune. It struck me that he had seen a lot of worry.

"It is good of you to spare me a few minutes, Mr. Blake," he said, speaking in a refined voice. "I am the owner of a house in Fulham—a small apartment house. It is quite select, however, and I just manage to make a fair living."

"Is it really necessary, Mr. Brunton, for you to enter into personal matters with me?" smiled Blake. "I understand that you are in a position to throw some light upon the recent burglary at Hatton Garden?"

Brunton nodded, and we regarded him with interest. He was obviously sincere; obviously honest. It was written in every line of his open features. He rose to his feet and clenched his fists in a sudden outburst.

"When I think of Van Dusen, I—I feel like breaking things!" he said huskily.

"I beg of you not to start here, my dear sir!" said Blake.

"That man is the vilest scoundrel unhung. Mr. Blake," went on Brunton, his eyes gleaming fiercely. "But for him I should be a rich man, instead of a lodging-house keeper! When I heard that he had been robbed I laughed with joy!"

"Then why have you come to me now?"

"Because I realise that my own personal affairs should not bias my judgment of what is right and wrong," replied Brunton. "I think I can put you on the track of the man who really stole the gems."

"One moment, Mr. Brunton," said Sexton Blake. "What reason have you for referring to Mr. Van Dusen as a vile scoundrel?"

Brunton sat down in his chair.

"Two or three years ago," he said, "I arrived in England from Africa, having worked for seven solid years, so that I might come home with a little substance for myself and the girl I was about to marry. Those seven years were fruitful, Mr. Blake, for I landed in England with diamonds in my possession worth ten thousand pounds. Van Dusen stole them from me—he deliberately stole them!"

"How was the theft accomplished?" asked Blake.

"I was a young fool!" exclaimed Brunton fiercely. "I went to Van Dusen without troubling to find out what his real character was. I knew he was a famous diamond merchant, and I thought I could go to no better man. As it happened, I went to him after office hours, without having previously made an appointment, and found him alone. I showed him my diamonds, and he told me that they were worth eight thousand pounds. I said he could have them for ten thousand, or not at all. And at last he agreed. I left the diamonds with him that night, and he promised me that I should have the money the next morning—"

"Dear me! Then you were foolish indeed," interrupted Blake gently. "Do you actually mean to tell me, Mr. Brunton, that you left your diamonds in Van Dusen's possession, merely on his promise to pay you in the morning?"

Our visitor shook his head.

"No; I was not quite such a duffer as that,"

he said bitterly. "But I was incautious; I made the mistake of thinking that Van Dusen was an honest man. He strongly advised me to leave the diamonds in his safe, instead of carrying them about on my person. At the time I thought it was decent of him, and I never suspected treachery. He wrote me out a receipt, signed it, and gave it to me for my inspection. It was in perfect order, and I knew that I was safe."

"But there was some trick about it?" asked the gov'nor.

"In the morning I presented myself at Van Dusen's office," said Brunton. "You may imagine my amazement when that bloated rogue disowned all knowledge of me. He said to my face that he had never seen me before, and that I had never handed him a single diamond. I was simply flabbergasted; I couldn't believe it."

"But you had the receipt!" I pointed out.

"That is what I told Van Dusen," said Brunton. "I produced it, as I thought, and it turned out to be nothing but a blank sheet of paper! Then I knew how I had been tricked. When Van Dusen handed me the receipt for my inspection I read it, and was about to put it in my pocket. He laughingly said that it would be better in an envelope, and he took it back and sealed it up. But the brute substituted the paper in some way, and sealed up a blank sheet. I didn't even look at it until I was in his office, the next morning. He must have burnt the real receipt. But what could I do? I seemed to be a liar myself after producing that blank paper, and it was impossible for me to go to the police. I had no case—no evidence. Walter van Dusen stole those diamonds from me deliberately."

"I have no hesitation, Mr. Brunton, in believing your statement," said Blake quietly.

"You do believe it?" asked our visitor. "I—I was afraid that you wouldn't, Mr. Blake. I have no proofs of any sort—"

"But I happen to know Van Dusen's character fairly well," Sexton Blake interrupted. "Your story does not surprise me. Van Dusen has committed worse crimes on many occasions. You were shamefully treated, my dear sir, but I'm afraid you had no redress. Van Dusen's crime was far worse than that of a common burglar, since he robbed you of all you possessed."

Brunton sighed.

"Well, it is no good talking about that now," he said. "All my dreams were shattered, of course, but my little girl was true to me, and we were married in spite of everything. And since then we have jogged along quietly."

"But you have something else to tell me, surely?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake, and it is this," replied Brunton. "A week or two ago a man took apartments in my house. His name was Horace Carslake, and he was exceedingly pleasant, and middle aged. He was so pleasant, indeed, that I soon found myself telling him my troubles. He was very sympathetic, and we became very friendly. In the course of our chats, I mentioned to him that Van Dusen would be receiving a big consignment of diamonds from Africa."

"How did you know that?" asked the gov'nor.

"I have been keeping my eye on Van Dusen constantly," replied Brunton grimly. "It has been my vain hope that I might be able to trap him—to expose him for the scoundrel he is. I also obtained information from one of Van Dusen's clerks. And I told all that to Carslake quite casually."

"And you think that Carslake is the thief?"

"The very idea seems preposterous, but I cannot help believing that he committed the crime," replied Brunton. "He vanished from his rooms on the very evening of the burglary—without settling his bill, by the way—and I have not set eyes on him since. I honestly believe that he took Van Dusen's diamonds."

"You know nothing about this man Carslake?"

"Nothing more than I have told you," replied Brunton.

"That amounts to practically nothing," said Blake. "He came to you as a stranger, and then suddenly disappeared. It is quite possible that he was an expert diamond-thief. I can assure you that such gentry are generally suave, pleasant-mannered individuals, adepts in the arts of disguise."

"That is what I feared myself—and that is why I came to you," said Brunton. "I didn't like to go to the police, Mr. Blake. Do you think you will be able to make use of my information?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"In one way, perhaps," he said. "If you will permit me to go home with you, and to examine the rooms recently occupied by Carslake, I might be able to pick up some scrap of information. There is no telling what such an investigation on my part will lead to. It might result in much or little. I cannot tell until I have examined Carslake's rooms. But he left hurriedly, and that may be a point in our favour. Have I your permission to go?"

"Why, of course—of course!" said Brunton eagerly.

I looked up keenly. Brunton seemed very anxious for us to go with him. But it was not another trap; had it been one, he would not have been so eager. Besides, if Brunton wasn't honest, I had never seen an honest man.

His story was significant, although I didn't see how it would help us. Both Sexton Blake and I were fairly convinced that Carslake was no less a person than Waldo. We could scarcely think anything else.

And so, without delay, we accompanied our new friend to Fulham, and were there introduced to a very charming young lady, who turned out to be Mrs. Brunton. It was a terrible shame that these young people should have been swindled out of their little fortune by a shark like Walter van Dusen.

Our investigations in the rooms lately occupied by Carslake were fruitless. We found absolutely nothing, and this only strengthened our belief that the fellow was really Waldo. We knew that Waldo would leave nothing of value behind him. His favourite trick was to fake up false evidence, but that had not happened here.

A real stroke of luck befell us, however.

While we were talking with Brunton, his wife appeared with a letter. It was addressed to Carslake, bore the Southend postmark, and was inscribed on the flap with the name and address of an estate agent.

"I suppose I'd better send it back to Southend," remarked Brunton.

"Just one moment," said Sexton Blake keenly. "This is rather curious, surely? This letter was posted five days ago, according to the Southend postmark. It should have been delivered four days ago. That is to say, it ought to have arrived long before Carslake left you."

"But why should it take five days on the way, gov'nor?" I asked curiously.

"Probably a mere coincidence— But wait," said the gov'nor. "I remember seeing in the paper a day or two ago that an accident occurred on the Southend line. A goods train ran into the rear of a passenger train, I believe, and the mail-coach was wrecked, and set on fire. Many mails were lost; but this letter, evidently, survived, and has just found its destination."

"Yes, that must be it, Mr. Blake," agreed Brunton.

Blake calmly opened the letter, and read it. It was from the estate agent, saying that "the bungalow was ready for occupation," and that the key would be handed over when Mr. Carslake chose to call for it.

"There's nothing in that, gov'nor," I remarked.

"You think not, Tinker," said Sexton Blake quietly. "You must allow me to differ. I fancy this letter is of the highest importance. Carslake, you must remember, ought to have had this letter long before he left—when it would certainly have been destroyed. My idea is that the man prepared a safe retreat for himself, so that he could retire to it after the coup."

"But the fellow wouldn't do it openly—"

"Why not?" asked Sexton Blake. "What was there to prevent him? In the identity of Carslake he was a respectable citizen, and there is even now nothing whatever to prove that he is the man who stole Van Dusen's diamonds. And don't forget that this letter was never intended for eyes other than Carslake's. Owing to that mishap on the railway, we have been provided with a definite opening."

"And what will you do, gov'nor?" I asked interestedly.

"I shall visit Southend at once—without a moment's delay," replied Sexton Blake. "I have an idea that such a journey will bear considerable fruit."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Samson the Second.

SOUTHEND had some distinguished visitors that morning.

I am not referring to myself particularly, but to others. Sexton Blake was in the famous seaside resort, to say

nothing of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, and five other leading lights of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"The whole thing may be a mare's nest, of course," remarked Lennard comfortably, as we left the station. "Still, I must admit that the thing looks fishy, Blake. And if we get hold of Waldo to-day it'll be your doing. I'm hanged if you're not the first in the field with this Waldo fellow every time!"

"If we do get him, inspector," I put in, "I should advise you to keep your hands on him!"

"A taunt!" exclaimed Lennard indignantly. "Do you always allow this young rascal to check the majesty of the law, Blake? I'll admit we've let Waldo go twice, but I wasn't responsible, thank goodness! I'll see that the fellow doesn't slip through my fingers!"

Our plan was a simple one. Having made inquiries at the estate agents, we discovered that Mr. Carslake had entered into occupation the previous day. And here, again, I might mention, there was a connection which we could only regard as significant. We believed that Waldo's retreat was here in Southend; and Waldo had planned to get the gov'nor placed on board a ship at Tilbury. It was practically in the same general district.

Sexton Blake and I were to visit the bungalow alone—boldly. Needless to say, our Scotland Yard friends would be close handy within call. Lennard, indeed, was to conceal himself exactly opposite the doorway of the bungalow.

Everything went off without a hitch. Lennard placed his men and got into his own position. This done, Sexton Blake and I strolled coolly along the road and made for the bungalow.

This was a pleasant little building, comparatively new, standing amongst a row of other bungalows. The road was a new one, and only one side was built upon. Facing the houses was a meadow, divided from the road by a hedge.

"Now, Tinker," said Blake grimly, "hold yourself ready for instant action!"

We arrived at the gateway, marched in, and approached the front door. This was glass-topped, with a curtain inside. Having rung the bell, therefore, Sexton Blake stood aside, and motioned me to do likewise. We didn't want Waldo to peep behind the curtains and get a glimpse of us.

The door opened, and Mr. Horace Carslake stood before us.

He didn't turn a hair. He regarded the gov'nor and I mildly, and with an air of inquiring curiosity. But, in spite of his clever disguise, we recognised the man as Rupert Waldo. And his acting was simply astounding.

"Well, gentlemen?" he asked.

"I have come from the estate agent—" began Sexton Blake.

"I think it would be better if we discussed matters inside," said Waldo. "Will you please step in?"

"Certainly!"

Sexton Blake went first, and I followed. But I pulled out my handkerchief, and jerked it violently behind me—unseen by Waldo. Detective-Inspector Lennard would understand that signal.

It was really splendid. Waldo was kidding himself that we had come there alone, and he had politely asked us to walk into his web. He probably thought that he could deal with us at his leisure.

We entered the front room, and "Carslake" indicated chairs.

"Is there some hitch about the bungalow?" he inquired. "I trust not, because I think I shall be comfortable here. And I have not the pleasure of knowing your name, my dear sir."

Sexton Blake laughed lightly.

"You do it extremely well, Waldo," he said. "I had no idea you were such a clever actor. But it's no use. Disguises are all very well superficially, but they do not conceal the really vital parts of a man's facial and bodily characteristics."

"I give you best, Blake!" said Waldo frankly. "I thought I should get clear this time. How in the name of wonder did you do it? I have heard it said that I am amazing, but I fancy you can beat me. Until a minute ago I thought you were performing the duties of a deck-hand on the schooner Cornish Coast."

"I didn't care for the job!" said Blake banteringly. "I want to know, Waldo, if you mean to submit quietly, or— Hold him, Tinker!"

While Blake was speaking he threw himself forward. I did the same. Waldo had abruptly made a dash for the door, and I knew why. He had caught sight of the Scotland Yard men, and realised that he was trapped.

For the gov'nor and I to hold him was

simply impossible. He threw us aside just as though we were a couple of school-children. Sexton Blake went staggering back over the table, and I reeled over dizzily. But I managed to grab one of Waldo's feet, and pulled it violently.

Crash!

Waldo went to the floor face downwards, and I heard his head strike the threshold like a hammer. But he was on his feet again in a second, unhurt. But he was too late. Detective-Inspector Lennard was in the doorway, backed by two other Yard men. And three more were scrambling through the window. It was one of the neatest captures I had seen.

"Afraid you're outnumbered this time, old man!" said Lennard pleasantly. "Better not try any games, you know! You may be strong, but there are eight of us here, and we mean business!"

"What infernal luck!" exclaimed Waldo. "Yes, I'm beaten!"

"Don't believe it, Lennard!" said Sexton Blake sharply. "Handcuff him at once, and have him completely surrounded!"

The chief-inspector grinned.

"How do you like the look of these, Mr. Waldo?" he asked, displaying a pair of enormous handcuffs. "You ought to feel honoured. We had them especially made for your use. They are of the finest steel, and I'll defy you to break them if you try it for fifty years! We've got another pair for your ankles."

"Thanks all the same," said Waldo grimly, "but I don't fancy that quality. I never go in for expensive things."

I knew what was coming, and so did the guv'nor. We both yelled at once, and grabbed the prisoner from behind. And we were right. For Waldo made an attempt to break away. It seemed sheer madness, and I know well enough that the C.I.D. men were taken by surprise. They had never deemed it possible that Waldo would try to escape.

I've seen a few fights, but this fairly staggered me.

"This is the part of the game I enjoy!" shouted Waldo exultantly.

He seized one of the detectives, whirled him off his feet, and threw him at two others. They collapsed, and Waldo turned to the door. He met Lennard and the guv'nor. The only thing possible was to get the man down, and to hold him down by sheer weight. Fighting was impossible.

With strength such as his he could have killed a man with one blow. Therefore we avoided his terrific thrusts, and gave all our energy to getting him down. But Waldo was desperate now.

He fought frenziedly. Again and again we held him, but he broke away every time. Two men were already stunned and out of action. A third was as good as useless. After every fresh outburst our force grew weaker.

And the end was inevitable.

In spite of our united efforts, Rupert Waldo at last succeeded in breaking a way through into the hall. How on earth he managed it I don't know, but I do know that he was even stronger than I had originally supposed.

He fled down the passage with Sexton Blake, Lennard, and I in full pursuit. Through the kitchen he charged, and slammed the door to behind him without pausing.

And then came the terrible sequel. Owing to the kitchen door being slammed, both Sexton Blake and I were saved from terrible injury. I am certain of that. For we were delayed, and prevented from entering the kitchen as early as we might have done.

Waldo relied upon his strength once too often. Not that it failed him—his strength, indeed, was his undoing. The back outer door was locked and bolted. He knew that. There was no time to unfasten it. He knew that also.

There was only one course, and that course was to charge the door bodily and smash it to pieces. No ordinary man would have attempted such a thing. But Waldo had no knowledge of pain; exertion was nothing to him.

And he charged.

The result was startling. The door was well made, but the scullery wasn't. It was a kind of addition—a jutting-out portion quite to itself. And instead of the door smashing to atoms, the whole outer wall collapsed.

It was easy to understand why this happened. Waldo acted as a kind of battering-ram, and the place being jerry-built, it could not withstand the strain.

Even as Sexton Blake was opening the flimsy inner door a terrific, appalling crash

sounded. We were smothered with dust and debris, and knocked in a heap, grazed, bruised, and staggered.

And when we picked ourselves up we found the scullery nothing but a mass of wreckage. The roof had fallen in, and underneath that great pile of debris, buried completely, lay what remained of Rupert Waldo.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Justice Defeated—but Justice Done.

"WELL, that's finished him!" said Detective-Inspector Lennard grimly.

We were gazing down upon our prisoner. He had been rescued from the wreckage, and was now lying upon the couch in the front room. Lennard's men were busily engaged in searching the bungalow from end to end.

It had been a delicate task, extracting Waldo from the debris. At first we had thought that he was dead. But the scullery had only been built of comparatively light materials, and Waldo had escaped any vital injuries. No bones seemed to be broken, but he was undoubtedly in a bad way.

He was terribly cut, battered, and otherwise mutilated. He was also suffering from concussion of the brain, for he was unconscious. A severe scalp wound had been dealt with by Sexton Blake on the spot.

Meanwhile, the ambulance had been sent for, and it was almost due to arrive. Waldo had been beaten at last, but not by his living enemies. He had been defeated because of his own strength.

"I'm rather sorry," said Sexton Blake. "I didn't want to see the man finish up in this way, Lennard. It's my opinion it won't be long before he's as active as ever—"

"My dear man, the fellow's smashed all up!" interjected the chief-inspector. "His bones may not be broken, but I'll warrant he's got a few severe internal injuries. It's my opinion he won't get over this."

"Well, I hope you're wrong," said the guv'nor.

"Wrong?"

"Certainly! I don't like to see a man fatally injured in this way, Lennard, even if he does happen to be a criminal," replied Blake. "But you have your opinion, and I have mine. Time will show which of us is right."

I couldn't look at Waldo without feeling jolly sorry for him. Somehow, in spite of the fact that he was a dangerous criminal, I didn't regard him as an ordinary wrong 'un. He had his good points, and if he had run in different grooves he might have been a fine citizen.

He had chosen crime as a career, and this was the result. I have always noticed that crime never pays in the long run, although it may be very profitable up to a certain point.

Waldo looked ghastly, and I turned away from the couch, feeling a bit gloomy. The guv'nor and I had been successful—we had run our man down, and he was in the hands of the police.

That is what we had set out to accomplish. And I suppose we ought to have been highly satisfied. As for Van Dusen's diamonds, I hardly gave them a thought. We had only investigated this case in order to get on the track of Waldo. Sexton Blake had fulfilled his promise to the diamond merchant, and we had completed our case. It was really for the police to do the rest.

"Well?" asked Lennard, as one of his men appeared.

"We've searched every room, sir, and we can find nothing of any account," replied the C.I.D. man. "Every place has been turned inside out, but there are no diamonds here."

"Confound the man!" growled Lennard. "But they must be here! He wouldn't have left them anywhere else. Have another search, Robson. Turn the garden upside down—look in the coal-cellar—look under the floor-boards!"

"We've done all that, sir," said Robson.

"Then do it again—more thoroughly!" snapped the chief-inspector.

The man retired, and Lennard grunted.

"It's all rot!" he said. "If the diamonds aren't here, where are they?"

"I don't want to discourage you, old man, but I hardly expected the diamonds to be here," said Sexton Blake. "Waldo only came

down yesterday, remember, and he wanted to be sure that he was safe. No matter how much he declared that he was an honest citizen—in the event of an inquiry—those diamonds on the premises would be fatal."

And, as a matter of fact, although the place was literally ransacked, nothing resulted. By this time the ambulance had taken Waldo away, and he was due to find a cot in the police infirmary.

We ourselves had not escaped very lightly. Sexton Blake and I were each cut in a dozen places—slight wounds, I'll admit, but annoying and painful. Lennard, too, had suffered from that scullery collapse; and two of Lennard's men were quite useless, having been knocked silly in the fight.

However, we had got the crook, and that was the main thing. And when the search was completely over, Lennard furiously lit a cigarette and glared round at the walls.

"I've got an idea those diamonds are here, even now," he said. "We haven't half looked yet. The fellow might have buried them, or dropped them into a hollow tree, or something. Perhaps he'll tell us when he recovers; it'll mean a lighter sentence, anyhow—What the deuce is the matter with that chap?"

He stared out of the window, and we followed the direction of his gaze. A uniformed police-constable had ridden up furiously on a bicycle. He now leapt off, flung his machine against the fence, and dashed to the front door.

"Can it possibly be—No; it must be wrong!" murmured Blake.

A moment later the constable charged into the front room, breathless and red-faced with excitement and amazement.

"He—he's escaped, sir!" he gasped hoarsely.

The chief-inspector stared.

"Who's escaped?" he demanded. "If you're trying to tell me that Waldo—"

"It's true, sir!" panted the policeman.

"He's got completely away!"

"Then my first suspicion was right," said Sexton Blake grimly.

"But—but it's mad!" shouted Lennard.

"Do you think I'm going to believe that Waldo has got away unaided—Oh! You mean that he was rescued by some of his confederates—"

"Waldo has no confederates," put in the guv'nor. "He works alone."

"Mr. Blake is right, sir," said the constable. "The man escaped without any help at all. It's the most amazing thing I've ever heard of! Came to life, he did, and escaped in the ambulance!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Lennard. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"I was one of the men sent with the ambulance, sir," replied the constable. "We went all right until we were getting near the infirmary. There were two men on the ambulance besides me, and we thought that the prisoner was unconscious."

"And so he was."

"He wasn't, sir, if you'll excuse me contradicting you," said the policeman. "All of a sudden he jumped off the stretcher, threw his two attendants out at the rear of the car—"

"But didn't you pull up?"

"Of course we did, sir—at least, we tried to. I was thrown down backwards, and I'm sure I don't know how I escaped being badly hurt. The driver was pitched out after me, and then the prisoner jumped into the seat and drove away furiously. That's the last we saw of him or the ambulance."

"Hang it all, I can't believe it!" declared the chief-inspector flatly. "It's like a confounded fairy-tale! The man was smashed all up—horribly cut and bruised and battered. I thought he was dying!"

"We all did, sir—until he came to life," said the constable feelingly.

Sexton Blake broke into a laugh.

"Quite funny, isn't it?" snapped Lennard, turning round.

"My dear fellow, there's no need to get into a temper about it," chuckled Blake. "I was only laughing because I realised how completely Waldo duped the lot of us. He was no more unconscious than I am. It was a ruse, Lennard—just that and nothing more."

"By jingo!" I exclaimed. "It must have been, guv'nor!"

"Waldo knew that he had no chance of escaping after that collapse," went on the guv'nor. "So what did he do? He pretended to be badly injured—"

"Pretended to be!" roared the inspector. "Well, he was badly injured, if that will please you better," said Sexton Blake. "But Waldo is different from other men, Lennard. As we have proved before, blows and burns and gashes leave him as formidable as ever. I must confess that I was hoodwinked this time, though. The man looked positively ghastly, and I thought he was done for. Instead of that he waited for the ambulance to come—intending, all the time, to make use of the car as a means of escape. Upon my soul! You can't help admiring the man's astuteness."

Detective-Inspector Lennard swore under his breath.

"If ever I capture that wizard again, even if he's dead, I'll handcuff him and chain him up!" he declared fiercely. "I've had a few surprises in my life, but this fairly leaves me winded! I raise my hat to that fellow!"

The next day Sexton Blake and I discussed the case at Baker Street with somewhat mixed feelings. We had succeeded, and yet we had failed. This seemed to be generally the case with Waldo. There was no holding the man. The tighter the corner, the easier he got out of it.

Reports had come in that the ambulance had been seen at different points. And the vehicle had finally been discovered in a ditch, many miles from Southend. Waldo himself had vanished, and no trace of him had been found.

How he had managed it was a mystery. And with regard to the diamonds, we had heard nothing further. It was my private opinion that we should never set eyes upon them at all. But I was wrong, and this was proved to me almost at once.

For the telephone bell rang, and I answered it.

"Well?" I asked. "Who's that?"

"I want to speak to Mr. Blake. Is he in?" came a voice.

"Yes," I replied. "What name, please?"

"Rupert Waldo," was the calm reply.

I nearly dropped the whole instrument.

"I say, none of those jokes!" I protested.

"I am not joking, Tinker," said the voice. "Don't you recognise me? I thought it rather unwise to call round personally, but I should rather like to have a chat with your master. Fetch him, there's a good fellow!"

I told the gov'nor in a dazed voice, and he could hardly believe me. I'll set down the conversation as it took place. There's a second receiver on our instrument, and I glued this to my ear.

"That you, Blake?" came Waldo's voice. "No, I'm not joking. I just want to compliment you upon your astuteness. I'm sorry I disappointed you yesterday, but I didn't much care for the idea of the police infirmary as a hotel. I have patched myself up quite satisfactorily, although I am showing myself as little as possible. I want you to express my regrets to Mr. Van Dusen—a mere formality, of course. Personally, I think he's a snaky rogue."

"Several shades worse than yourself, Waldo," remarked the gov'nor.

"Thanks for the compliment!" said our extraordinary enemy. "Oh, and I should like to tell you what I have done about the diamonds. I'm not greedy, and I'm only keeping ten thousand pounds' worth. All the rest will go to deserving charities, and other people. When I want some more money, I can easily get it. Before long I hope to meet you again. Good-bye!"

We heard the line "close," and we both hung up our receivers.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed amazedly.

"The man's cheek is colossal!" said Sexton Blake. "I don't believe what he said about the diamonds—"

The door of the consulting-room burst open, and Edgar Brunton appeared, hot and excited.

"You'll never believe it, Mr. Blake!" he panted. "I don't know what to do; I'm in a complete muddle. But I thought I'd come to you first."

"What about?" asked Blake.

"Less than an hour ago a District Messenger-boy delivered a parcel at my house," said Brunton. "This is it, Mr. Blake. It contains forty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds—from Carslake!"

The gov'nor and I stared in amazement at the uncut stones, and at a neatly typewritten request that Brunton should keep ten thousand pounds' worth of the diamonds for himself—the amount out of which he had been swindled—and that the rest should be distributed amongst hospital funds.

It was scarcely surprising that Brunton should have been half dazed, and unable to decide what to do. Sexton Blake soon settled the matter. He wrapped the parcel up, and handed it to the startled young man.

"I prefer to know nothing about this, Brunton," he said quietly. "I advise you to go away, and act as you think best. That's all I need say, except that I have my own opinion as to what you ought to do."

Sexton Blake's opinion was the same as Brunton's evidently. For we learned, some days later, that the diamonds had been disposed of to an honest firm, and that many hospitals had benefited to the exact amount stipulated. The rest went into Edgar Brunton's own pocket. It had a perfect right to be there, for it belonged to him.

"Really, Tinker," remarked the gov'nor languidly, "there is nothing whatever to prove that those diamonds were really Van Dusen's—even I couldn't prove. And I honestly tell you that I am heartily glad that Waldo defeated justice by escaping."

"Why are you glad, gov'nor?" I asked curiously.

"Because justice has been done to others," was Sexton Blake's quiet reply. "Mr. Walter van Dusen will never see his precious parcel of stones again—not that that will be any hardship, for he already wallows in ill-gotten riches. I consider that the affair has ended really splendidly!"

"Waldo in a new role!" I exclaimed, with a grin. "Righting the wrongs of a scoundrel's victims. That chap is the most astounding opponent we have ever had, gov'nor. I wonder when we shall come across him again?"

"Yes, Tinker, I wonder?" murmured Sexton Blake dreamily.

THE END.

New Short Serial.

FROM SCHOOL TO SEA.

BY CHARLES HAMILTON.

INTRODUCTION.

Between DICK TREVELYAN, a boy of fifteen, and MR. GADSBY, his stepfather, there is bitter blood. The boy's real father has died, suspected of murder, and Gadsby takes any opportunity of taunting his stepson with this unpleasant fact.

Should Dick die a small fortune is to come into the hands of Gadsby. The latter concocts a scheme with a schoolmaster named CARKER, and the result is that Dick is transferred to the school of that gentleman, where he has an unpleasant time.

Dick runs away from the school, closely followed by SAMUEL CARKER, son of the headmaster, and an enemy of Dick's.

They both manage to get taken on a vessel. Several of the sailors on board mutiny, and are joined by young Carker. The mutineers get the upper hand, and Dick is placed in one of the ship's boats with the skipper and some faithful sailors. They are left to the mercy of the sea, and Carker thinks that he has successfully disposed of Dick. After many hours of agony, however, a sail is sighted.

(Now read on.)

Breakers Ahead—Cast Ashore.

HOURS passed. The topsails came clear into view; but the storm-cloud in the south was growing blacker and blacker, and spreading over the sky. A look of savage disappointment came over Denton's face.

"Curse the luck! I know them spars! It's the Boadicea!"

"The Boadicea!" repeated Flaherty and Johnson, in blank dismay.

Dick lunged himself down in the boat. It was the Boadicea, and hope of rescue had gone.

"Curse them! What are they doing here?" the boatswain muttered. "All drunk, I suppose. Having a high old time, and letting

things slide. By Davy Jones, they must be drunk, or they wouldn't leave all the canvas set with this here blow coming on."

It was clear that the Boadicea was following no regular course. As the seamen watched her she suddenly swerved and stood northward. The helmsman—if there was a man at the helm—must have been half-seas-over.

The topsails were sinking below the horizon again. The danger of the castaways now claimed all their attention.

The storm burst with the fury common to tempests in the so-called "Pacific."

A growling roar of wind, a rush of inky blackness across the sky, and foam-topped waves leaping and tumbling in wild disorder.

Denton had taken in the sail and lowered the mast. But he had no hope of weathering the storm.

"Say your prayers, mates. The game's up."

Like a cork the boat was tossed upon the leaping billows. It seemed a miracle that she was not instantly overwhelmed. The seamen began to bale desperately, fighting off their doom to the last possible moment.

Above the roar of the wind and waves they gradually became aware of a deeper sound—a dull, reverberating boom, boom!

The boatswain clicked his teeth.

"Breakers!"

"Land, then!" exclaimed Dick. "There's a chance for us yet!"

Denton shrugged his shoulders.

The boat tore on, escaping destruction, as it appeared to Dick, by a series of miracles.

Louder, deeper, sounded the booming of the breaking waves.

Dimly, darkly through the storm-shadowed air loomed a black mass ahead.

It was land, some rocky island of the lone Pacific, upon the shores of which the billows broke and roared.

"Look out!" yelled Denton.

A thundering wave smote the dancing craft. It was the last straw. Flooded, dislocated,

the boat turned turtle. Buffeted and blinded, the four struggled in the raging sea.

Dick clutched at the snapping mast; by sheer luck caught it. Holding it tenaciously, he was whirled shoreward along with it. A racing wave flung him towards the land. He felt the pebbles grinding under his feet.

In such blinding, confused commotion no man could have kept his head. Dick simply struggled with the instinct which all living things have to keep alive.

He felt, as we say, the pebbles beneath him. Only for a moment. A receding wave sucked him back to the hungry ocean.

Back to the raging billows, only half-conscious by this time. Then forward again, tossed among the breakers like a ball from a bat.

With every ounce of strength beaten out of him, he let go the spar and slipped back to death—to the death that roared and foamed and howled behind him.

A grip upon his collar, an indistinct snout of encouragement, and he was dragged through dashing wave and piling sand, high, if not dry, upon a pebbly beach.

He was too far gone to even feel curious. He had been saved, but he was incapable of emotion then.

He lay still, listening dully to the roar of the storm, panting hard.

A few minutes, and exhaustion passed. Strength came creeping back. He breathed more regularly. He lifted his head and looked about him.

He saw a stout stake planted in the ground near him. From it ran a rope, which disappeared into the frothing breakers. He understood. The island was inhabited. His rescuer, whoever he was, had gone out a second time at the end of the rope to attempt to save another life.

"A brave fellow! Heaven bless him!"

The rope swayed and swung. From the wild waters came staggering a stalwart figure, right hand clutching the rope, left hand holding to a senseless form. Denton, the boatswain, was laid beside Dick, and the rescuer, panting and exhausted, sank down upon the sand.

He was upon his feet again in a minute or two. Dick could only see in the dimness that he was a white man of powerful frame. He swept the waters with an anxious gaze. Then he looked at Dick, and, seeing that he was conscious, spoke.

"How many were in your boat?"

"Four."
Again the stranger, with sombre brow, gazed seaward.
"Then two are lost."
"I thought we were all lost. We should have been if you hadn't fished us out. I'm awfully grateful!"
"You do not need to thank me. I would run twice the risk if only to see an English face again. Can you walk?"
"Yes."
Dick rose.
"Come, then."
He lifted Denton in his arms, and moved away. Dick followed him up the beach. Wedged in between two cliffs was a little wooden hut.
There was a dim light within. It proceeded from a primitive kind of lamp—a wick floating in a gourd of oil, burning dimly, but filling the hut with its odour.
The stranger set down the boatswain, who was beginning to come to himself, upon a bed of rushes. Dick looked curiously at the man of the island.
A quaint figure he had never seen. The islander was a man of powerful build. His face, tanned by the sun, was very dark, but clearly a white man's. His garb was nondescript. Remnants of old sailor clothes were caked out with skins and vegetable fibres skillfully woven. His hair and beard were long and thick.
He caught Dick's look, and smiled slightly.
"You are thinking I look like Robinson Crusoe," he said. He spoke good enough English, with a certain hesitancy as of a man unaccustomed to speech. "No doubt. I have been five years upon this island, which holds no soul but myself."
"Five years?" cried Dick, aghast.
The castaway pointed to a log. Its surface was scarred with innumerable notches.
"That is my calendar. Each of those notches represents a day."
"And there are—"

"One thousand seven hundred and ninety-five."
Dick felt a sensation of horror. Had he been saved for this, then, to share this terrible Crusoe life till death closed his eyes?
"And in five years you have never seen a sail?"
"Never! This lonely rock is far out of the course of ships. If I had a boat— Ah, perhaps yours will come ashore!" His face became hopeful. "In a boat I believe I could reach the continent of Australia. Good heavens, what would I not give to see Old England again, and to learn what has become of my poor boy?" He sighed. "I suppose, now, you have never happened to meet a lad—a little younger than you, I should say—of the name of Percy Conway?"
Dick fairly jumped.
"Percy Conway?"
"Yes. Do you know him?"
"He was my schoolmate."
The castaway's sombre face became eagerly animated.
"He is alive, then? He is well?"
"Alive? Certainly, and"—Dick hesitated as he recalled the conditions of life at Cliff House under the sway of Elisha Carker—"and fairly well. But you—who are you?"
"I am Captain Conway."
"Percy's father!"

The Way of the Transgressor—The Wreck of the Boadicea.

DICK slept soundly that night—soundly, though the storm roared with ever-increasing violence.
Morning broke dim and drear. The ocean was still lashed to fury by a raving wind. Still the breakers rushed, foaming upon the pebbly beach of the lone islet.
The sun struggled to appear through heavy clouds, but only a dim half-light fell upon the troubled waters.
Captain Conway produced cassava bread,

boiled fish, yams and bananas and cocoanuts for the breakfast of his guests, and, in spite of their late experiences, they contrived to make a substantial meal.
The captain asked endless questions, mainly about Percy; and although Dick wanted to avoid giving him pain, he was too closely cross-examined to be able to conceal the truth about Cliff House School.
His own story he told, and Conway listened with deep interest. He wrung Dick's hand a dozen times.
"Heaven bless you for being a friend to my boy!" he exclaimed, with emotion. "So he thinks me dead?"
"Yes. It will be a surprise to him if we ever get home to England."
"We must," said Captain Conway feverishly. "We must! We shall!"
The boatswain had gone out to look at the sea. A sudden shout from him startled Captain Conway and Dick. They hurried out.
The boatswain's finger pointed seaward.
A large vessel, with a mast gone and her rigging hanging in tatters, was driving helplessly towards the shore.
Dick uttered a cry.
"The Boadicea!"

(To be continued.)

Next Week's Story of **SEXTON BLAKE** and **TINKER** will be entitled: **"THE CASE OF THE BLACK FEATHER; or, The Amazing Affair at the Hotel Magnificent,"** introducing "The Bat" and "Dolly" Dexter. Please order in advance to make sure of getting this magnificent yarn.

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£300 will be Paid for Correct Forecast or NEAREST.

Below you will find a coupon giving twelve matches which are to be played on SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22nd. We offer the sum of £300 for a correct or nearest forecast of the results of these matches. No goals are required.

All that competitors have to do is to strike out, in ink, the names of the teams they think will lose. If, in the opinion of the competitor, any match, or matches, will be drawn, the names of both teams should be left untouched.

The competitor who succeeds in accurately forecasting the results of all the matches on one coupon will be awarded the sum of £300. If no one forecasts the results of the twelve matches correctly, the money will be paid to the reader whose forecast is nearest. In any case the full amount of £300 must be won.

Coupons, which must not be enclosed in envelopes containing efforts in other competitions, must be addressed to:

FOOTBALL COMPETITION No. 13,
Gough House, Gough Square,
LONDON, E.C. 4,

and must reach that address not later than THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20th. This coupon and offer will appear again next week.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Answers," "The Family Journal," "Home Companion," "Woman's World," "The Marvel," "The Butterfly," and "Answers' Library," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.

RULES WHICH MUST BE STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

1. All forecasts must be made on coupons taken from "Answers," "The Family Journal," "Home Companion," "Woman's World," "Marvel," "The Butterfly," "Answers' Library," and "Union Jack," dated February 15th, or the issues of those journals dated February 22nd, and it is essential that the names of teams shall be struck out in black ink. The undertaking at the foot of the coupon to accept the Editor's decision as final must also be signed in black ink, and the address clearly given.

2. Any alteration or mutilation of the coupon will disqualify the effort.

3. The prize of £300 will be paid to the competitor who sends in on one coupon the correct results of all the matches. Should no competitor succeed in doing this, the prize will be awarded to the one

sending a coupon showing the nearest number of correct predictions. In the event of ties the prize will be divided. In any case the full amount of £300 will be paid, even should any of the matches be abandoned. If that should happen, such matches will not be taken into consideration in the adjudication.

4. The Editor reserves the right to disqualify any coupon for which, in his opinion, is good and sufficient reason, and it is a distinct condition of entry that the Editor's decision shall be accepted as final and legally binding in all matters concerning this competition.

5. No correspondence may be enclosed with the coupons, and none will be entered into. Neither will interviews be granted.

6. Entries will be accepted until THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20th. Any received after that date will be disqualified. No responsibility can be undertaken for any effort or efforts lost, mislaid, or delayed. Proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery. Unstamped or insufficiently stamped efforts will be refused.

Football Competition No. 13.

Matches Played SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22nd.
Closing Date, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20th.

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|-------------------|----------------------|
| WEST HAM UNITED | v. BRENTFORD |
| TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR | v. FULHAM |
| CHELSEA | v. MILLWALL |
| BARNLEY | v. COVENTRY CITY |
| GRIMSBY TOWN | v. BIRMINGHAM |
| LEICESTER FOSSE | v. HULL CITY |
| BLACKPOOL | v. STOCKPORT COUNTY |
| BURNLEY | v. MANCHESTER UNITED |
| BURY | v. LIVERPOOL |
| KILMARNOCK | v. HEARTS |
| MOTHERWELL | v. THIRD LANARK |
| RANGERS | v. CLYDEBANK |

I enter Football Competition No. 13 in accordance with the Rules and Conditions announced above, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.

Signed

Address.....

U.J.....