

**RETURN of the WONDER-MAN!**

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*ADAMS*  
**IN THE GRIP OF  
WALDO**

A magnificent new story of  
SEXTON BLAKE and his assistant  
TINKER, re-introducing that  
remarkable character RUPERT  
WALDO, the Wonder-Man.  
Complete in this Issue.





## THE WORST HOUSE AT ST WALSTAN'S.

OUR FINE SCHOOL SERIAL.

### TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY.

The worst House at St. Walstan's School is that run by Mr. Flackton. Backward in sport, and with low prestige generally, it also suffers from semi-starvation due to Mr. Flackton's bad catering. Tony Smith, a boy from Australia, is the leader of a revolt against the Housemaster's methods.

Flackton, brought to bay, has a stormy interview with the butcher, to whom he owes money. He does not go too far, however, as he wants to ask a favour.

(Now read on.)

### Trouble With Chopkins.

VERY nervously he proceeded to ask it.

"As I mentioned the other afternoon," he said, "I should be perfectly willing to pay a higher price per pound if you could see your way to sending along meat of rather better quality."

But Thomas Chopkins couldn't see his way to doing that. He much preferred to palm off on Mr. Flackton old and inferior stock, which otherwise would have

remained on his hands. So he declined the proposal almost ferociously.

"I tell you now, once an' for all, wot I told yer t'other day!" he snapped. "You'll get wotever it suits me to send along! Beggars can't be choosers. Day arter day I receives your horder for so much beef or so much mutton. Bein' the soft-hearted fool I am, I supplies the weight you asks for at a price which 'ardly pays for the trouble o' cuttin' up the jints an' deliverin' 'em."

"An', wot's more, I never sees the colour o' your money! The bill runs on an' on, an' you puts me off wi' promises! An' now you've got the face to ask me to send you the very pick o' the shop! Oh, no, Mr. Flackton! My best goods goes to my best customers—them as planks down ready-money, or settles their bills reg'lar every week."

"This is my final word," concluded the butcher. "For another month I'll supply your daily horder so far as quantity is consarned. But, as regards the quality, you'll 'ave no say wotsomever! You'll jist 'ave wot you can get, an' thank your lucky stars I ain't county-courted you long ago for wot's owin'!"

Chopkins had the whip-hand, and knew it. In vain did Mr. Flackton try argument and cajolery. His creditor was adamant. So, finally, the Housemaster abandoned all hope of obtaining any concession, and departed from the shop. His heart was full of hatred and

bitterness as he made his way along the street. The insolence of Chopkins was becoming unbearable. Oh, how he wanted to revenge himself on the insulting brute! And—oh, how he wanted to revenge himself also on the boy who had brought about the trouble!

Yes, Smith was at the bottom of it all. If only he could get even with Smith, he would be satisfied.

Well, revenge must wait for a while. The immediate, pressing necessity was the obtaining of better food for his boarders. Any repetition of to-day's revolt must be prevented at all costs!

There was only one way of quieting Smith and his fellow-malcontents. It would be an expensive way, but that could not be helped.

For a time, at any rate, the boys' dietary must be improved. And the improvement must take place at once, otherwise some of the brats would probably be writing letters of complaint to their parents.

Very well, then. For the next three weeks they should be fed on the fat of the land. Their joints should be supplied by Wadlow, the best-class butcher in the town. Wadlow sold only meat of the finest quality, and his prices were correspondingly high.

Mr. Flackton groaned inwardly as he thought of those prices. Nevertheless, he presently entered the expensive establishment, and gave an order for beef and mutton that caused old John Wadlow's eyes to open wide in surprise.

The worthy tradesman's surprise was natural, seeing that hitherto he had only supplied sufficient meat for the daily wants of Mr. and Mrs. Flackton and the senior boys in the house.

There would be no chance of running up a long bill with John Wadlow. A weekly settlement had been his strict rule in dealing with Mr. Flackton ever since the time—some two years back—when the Housemaster got heavily into arrears.

So much difficulty had Wadlow experienced in getting settlement of these arrears, that he had civilly but plainly informed his long-winded customer that a week's credit was the

(Continued on page 22.)

## WRIGLEY'S OFFER OF 100,000 FOOTBALLS AND PAIRS OF FOOTBALL BOOTS

DO you want a full-sized Football or a splendid pair of Football Boots at HALF-PRICE? Come along, then. The 25,000 we first offered on these terms went like hot cakes, but we have secured another consignment of 100,000 Footballs, and we have also made special arrangements to include 100,000 pairs of Football Boots in this offer. The Ball is honestly worth 24/-, and so are the Boots, but you can have either for 12/- only. Club Secretaries, cut this out and show to all your members, and be sure to tell them to apply AT ONCE.

The Football is made by Spalding's, of the toughest English hide, full-size, hand-sewn, with a bladder of the finest red rubber. It is exactly the ball used by the premier clubs. The Boots are Spalding's famous Hotspur pattern. Light Russet, laced to toe, with strap; raised shank waist; bevel-edge sole, rivetted—as worn by the crack players.

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SEND 14/- for a box containing 48 bars of WRIGLEY'S Assorted Flavours, and the Football or the Boots. State clearly which you want, and in the case of Boots the size must be given. It is best to send a pencil outline of your stockinged foot. Whichever you choose will be sent with the chewing sweet, carriage paid, within 3 or 4 days.

ALTERNATIVELY, send 50 wrappers saved from 1d. bars of WRIGLEY'S, together with a postal order for 12/- only. Don't forget to give your address, and say Football or Football Boots.

YOUR MONEY WILL BE INSTANTLY REFUNDED if you are not delighted with your bargain. If you prefer a Rugby shape ball in the same quality, or Black Rugby Boots with bars, say so in your letter. Address—

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# WRIGLEY'S

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has taken a great liking to  
**WRIGLEY'S CHEWING GUM,**  
particularly when engaged  
in sport.

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MOUTH COOL AND MOIST**

**3d PER PKT.**

**SEALED TIGHT  
—KEPT RIGHT**

**The Flavour  
Lasts!**

**SOLD EVERYWHERE**





# IN THE GRIP OF WALDO

In this fine story one of the UNION JACK'S old characters reappears after an absence of many months. RUPERT WALDO, usually known as the "Wonder-Man" on account of his amazing feats of strength and his natural immunity from pain, once again crosses the path of SEXTON BLAKE and TINKER—with what strange results this thrilling narrative will show.

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## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"I Say, This Is Astounding!"



JIMMY SAVILLE stared in incredulous horror.

"It's a head, Bray—a human head!" he ejaculated hoarsely.

"Good heavens!" said Harold Bray. "But—but it can't be! There must be some fake about it, Jimmy. Some—"

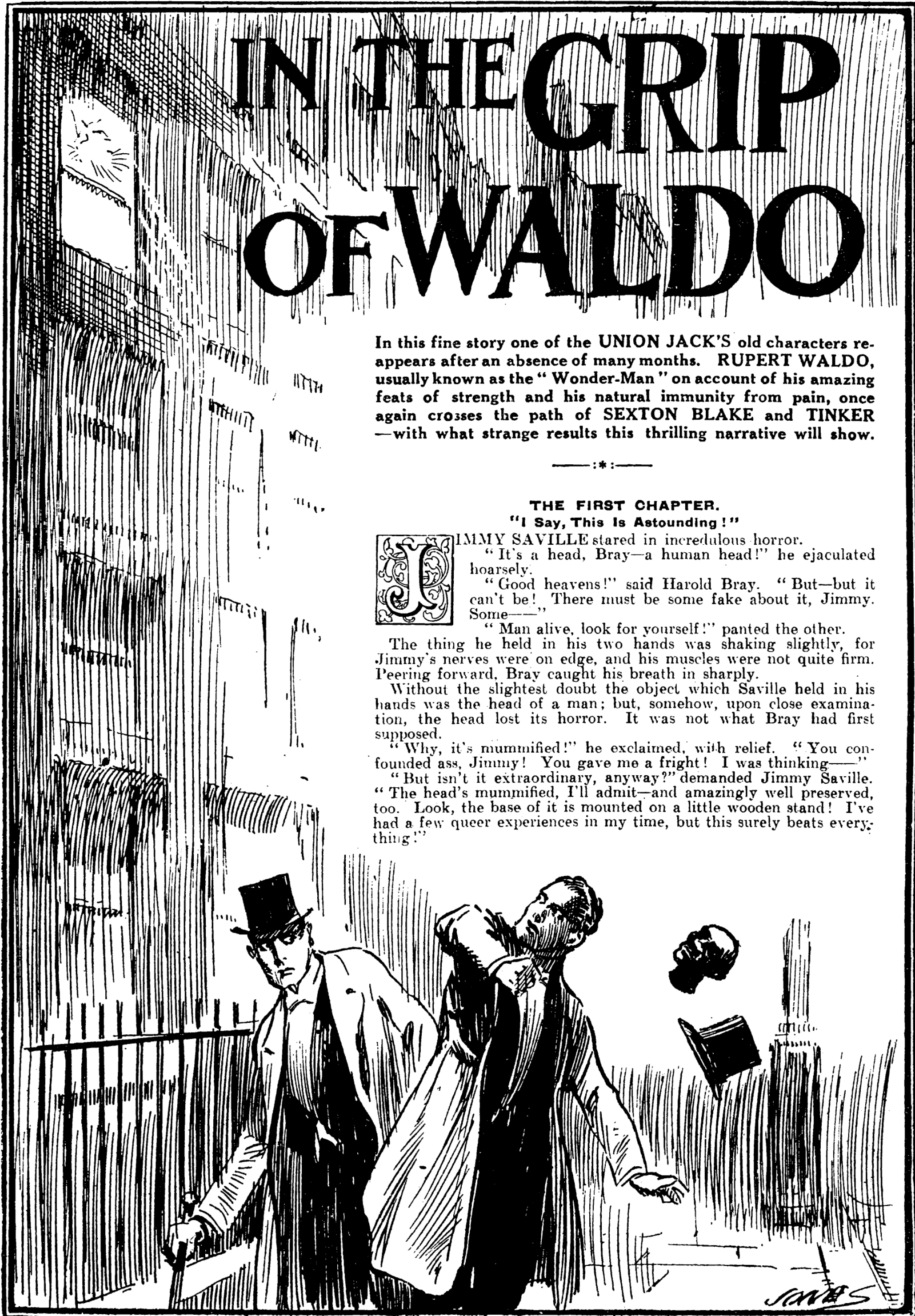
"Man alive, look for yourself!" panted the other.

The thing he held in his two hands was shaking slightly, for Jimmy's nerves were on edge, and his muscles were not quite firm. Peering forward, Bray caught his breath in sharply.

Without the slightest doubt the object which Saville held in his hands was the head of a man; but, somehow, upon close examination, the head lost its horror. It was not what Bray had first supposed.

"Why, it's mummified!" he exclaimed, with relief. "You confounded ass, Jimmy! You gave me a fright! I was thinking—"

"But isn't it extraordinary, anyway?" demanded Jimmy Saville. "The head's mummified, I'll admit—and amazingly well preserved, too. Look, the base of it is mounted on a little wooden stand! I've had a few queer experiences in my time, but this surely beats every-thing!"







For a few moments the two young men said nothing.

It was after midnight—indeed, getting on towards one o'clock in the morning—and London was quiet and stilled, except for the distant rumble of railway traffic and the occasional purr of a belated taxicab from the direction of Oxford Street.

Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray were in Trevor Avenue, a quiet thoroughfare in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park. As a matter of fact, they had been strolling home to Jimmy's rooms.

Bray had only just turned up in London after some years abroad, and he had lost no time in calling upon his old Oxford chum, Saville. And the pair, after a theatre and a supper, were just on their way home. The night was so calm and mild that they had decided to walk, and talk over old times.

Both were attired in evening-dress, with light overcoats. And it need not be supposed that they were any the worse for drink. As a matter of fact, they were both perfectly sober, having partaken very sparingly of the lightest of light wine during supper.

And now, in Trevor Avenue, this extraordinary thing had happened.

The incident had taken place two minutes earlier. Strolling along, arm-in-arm, the two young men were startled by a sudden splintering of glass over their heads. Then something had come thudding down. And this something, in fact, had knocked Jimmy's hat flying. The hat had protected its owner's head excellently.

Considerably astonished, and not a little indignant, Saville had retrieved his damaged headgear, and had then picked up the object which had come with such startling suddenness from the smashed window on the third storey of the large building which rose sheer from the pavement.

And, as Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray had discovered, that object was nothing more nor less than a mummified human head!

They examined it with greater interest.

The light was not particularly good, for there was no street-lamp just handy. But it could be seen that the head was a full-sized one, and apparently that of a man of about sixty. The skin was wrinkled and startlingly lifelike, although upon touching it Jimmy felt that it was like parchment—as hard as a board. To the touch it was by no means horrifying.

But in appearance the thing gave Jimmy a turn every time he looked at it, for the colouring was extraordinarily lifelike and well preserved.

"Hang it all! What shall we do?" asked Bray, with a sudden laugh.

"There's no need to grin about it—"

"My dear fellow, what's the good of doing anything else?" asked Bray. "Now I come to think of it, there is something rather humorous about this business. Two perfectly tame young men are strolling home when a head comes hurtling down from nowhere—"

"Nonsense! It came from a third storey window!"

"Well, that's nowhere to us!" went on Bray. "What a chap you are to quibble! This head comes whizzing down, nearly brains you—a frightfully difficult proposition, by the way—and then it calmly sits on the pavement and grins at us. Are you sure we only had one small bottle of light wine?"

Jimmy Saville grunted.

"I do wish you'd be serious, Hal!" he exclaimed. "This affair isn't one to joke about! Don't you understand?"

"I'm hanged if I do!"

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"We've got to do something!" said Jimmy helplessly.

"Good!" agreed Bray. "What shall we do?"

"I—I don't know—"

"Then what on earth's the good of saying we've got to do it?" grinned Bray.

"The best idea, to my mind, is to proceed with a little investigation. This head dropped from a window up there, and as far as my weak intelligence can penetrate, this building is a block of flats."

"Any idiot can see that!" snapped Jimmy.

"Quite so—even you could!" agreed Bray calmly. "It stands to reason, therefore, that this head came out of a flat. Now, the puzzle is this—why do people want to go throwing shrivelled heads into the street? That's the problem we've got to solve, old man!"

Jimmy Saville glared.

"I don't think you've ever been serious in all your life, Hal!" he declared. "Your talk about investigation is piffle! There's only one thing that we can do, so far as I can see."

"And what is that, my dear Watson?"

"Find the nearest policeman, and hand this infernal thing over to him, you duffer!" said Jimmy. "We don't want it, I'm quite certain. Neither do we want to be mixed up in any crime or—"

"You prize ass!" grinned Bray. "Who's talking about crime? There's evidently been an accident, or something. The head is just an ornament, I suppose, and it must have fallen out of the window. Or perhaps a couple of cheerful individuals up in the flat were having a row, and they started throwing heads at one another. You can't tell. And I suggest that we go up to the third floor and see what's doing. We shall probably meet somebody on the way, anyhow—somebody coming down to recover the spoils!"

"Perhaps you're right, Hal," said Jimmy Saville. "After all, we needn't mix the police up in it until we're satisfied that there's something fishy about it. But how can we tell which flat it came from?"

They both looked up; but they could not see any window with a smashed frame, owing to the gloom. However, at the first crash of breaking glass they had noticed that it was from a third floor window that the head had come shooting down. And a few yards ahead lay the entrance to the flats.

They walked forward.

"The thing gave me a shocking turn at first," said Bray. "I was expecting to see gore flowing, and I was picturing some frightful ruffian up in that flat with a chopper—"

"Don't be so horribly bloodthirsty, Hal!" protested the other. "What I can't understand is why the head didn't go into powder when it struck the ground!"

"If it was a head like yours it might have done—"

"Don't you understand, you aggravating bounder, that mummified heads generally go to powder if they're thrown about?" asked Saville. "That's what I've always understood, anyway."

"There are different ways of preserving mummies," said Bray. "This one seems to be in specially fine order. The owner is welcome to it. Personally, I shouldn't like to have an article of that sort walking about my house!"

By this time the two friends were in the entrance-hall of the block of flats, and they found it quite deserted. There was no hall-porter—not even a boy. So they marched upstairs until, finally, they reached the third floor.

According to their calculations the flat they were seeking was on the right-hand side of the landing. Indeed, there could be no mistake about it. But now that they were practically on the spot they didn't exactly know how to proceed. Jimmy halted on the stairs. "I don't like this!" he murmured. "Dash it all, we can't go and knock people up, and ask them if they've been dropping heads down in the road!"

Bray grinned.

"It would sound a bit queer if we knocked up the wrong party," he replied. "Still, there's only one head, and that makes it a bit better. Why, by Jove! Do my eyes deceive me, or do they not?"

He was staring at the doorway of the flat on the right. It was No. 19, and it was clearly indicated by a brass tablet. And the door itself was slightly ajar. This was rather significant.

"Come on!" said Bray. "We can't hang about all night!"

He marched up the remaining stairs, and jammed his thumb upon the bell-push. An insistent buzzing sounded somewhere within the flat. But the two young men waited in vain.

"Very careless!" murmured Bray. "What do you think of it, Jimmy? These people need talking to! Fancy going out and leaving the door open, and allowing the head of Abdullah the Tenth to go for a stroll on its own!"

Without waiting for Jimmy to reply, Bray pushed the door open, and found himself in a little lobby. Beyond, there was a well-furnished hall, and an electric light was burning under a soft shade.

"Anybody at home?" called Bray, in a stage-whisper.

There was dead silence.

"Come out of this, you ass!" whispered Jimmy. "We're getting deeper and deeper into this affair—"

"All the better," interrupted the other. "There's nothing I like more than a thrill. But, seriously, old man, we can't leave the thing in this state. Nobody seems to be at home, so we'd better have a look round."

"What if we're caught in here?"

"Well, man alive, we aren't burglars, are we?" said Bray. "We've simply come up to restore some valuable property. For all we know, the owner of this flat might have had a fit, and requires a doctor. Anyhow, we're going to have a look round."

It was idle for Jimmy to protest, even if he wanted to do so. But, as a matter of fact, he was as curious as Bray. And, together, they walked into the hall, and looked round them.

Two doorways were quite near them, and both were standing ajar. Bray reached forward, and switched on the electric light in one apartment, which turned out to be a bed-room, comfortably furnished, and extremely neat and tidy.

"Hallo!" called Bray. "Is there anybody here?"

Still there was no reply. A brief glance round told the visitors that the room was innocent of all human occupants, save themselves. They withdrew into the hall, and Jimmy shook his head.

"Drawn blank!" he remarked. "Better try the next."

They opened the next door, and again Bray switched on the light. This room was also empty. It was a superbly-furnished study, with a mahogany pedestal desk in the centre, a rich carpet, and numerous bookcases. The whole apartment spoke of wealth and luxury.

"I say, this is astounding!" muttered Jimmy Saville.

There was another door quite close to this one, and it was closed. Jimmy turned the handle, and the door opened at once. Here the electric lights were full





on—a dull, subdued kind of glow came out into the hall. The young man hesitated before pushing the door open.

Somehow they felt that something mysterious lay beyond.

"Anybody here?" asked Bray cautiously.

Silence!

With a muttered exclamation Bray pushed open the door, and he and his companion looked in. For the first moment they were too astonished to say anything at all. There was nothing particularly horrible about this apartment. But it was so uncommon—so bizarre in every detail—that the two young men could only stand there and stare.

From the ceiling a pendant descended, with a single electric light, encased in a peculiarly-shaped shade—a shade which entirely enclosed the light, and sent a weird diffused glow throughout the room.

This glow was of a bluish tint, with just a tinge of green in it, and it gave everything a strange character. And the articles in the apartment were strange enough, in all conscience, without the assistance of the light.

Immediately under the pendant there stood a kind of square platform, about a foot high. In the centre of this there was a quaintly-carved pedestal. But it had no ornament on the top. This top surface was flat and highly polished, and there was a faint circular mark on it. In other words, within the circle there was no dust, but round the edges a faint film had collected.

"By Jove!" whispered Jimmy. "Don't you see, Hal?"

"See what?"

"That pedestal," said the other. "This head must have stood upon it—there's the dust mark. But why in the world should anybody keep a mummified head in the very centre of the room, as though for exhibition?"

"It's no good asking me," said Bray. "But look at everything else! Did you ever see anything so extraordinary?"

There was no furniture of the ordinary type in the room. There were chairs, certainly, but they were dull black, and of a peculiar shape. The floor was covered with thick black felt. And all the walls were designed in a series of panels. In the centre of each panel hung hideously-carved figures. They were mounted, and were apparently carved from hard wood, and each one represented a human face. But they were grotesque and almost horrifying to look at.

These grinning, gaping faces looked down from all sides. Every one contained eyes—eyes that were uncannily lifelike. And, whichever way the two intruders looked, these cold, glassy eyes stared at them. The effect was most uncomfortable and eerie.

Jimmy shivered as he looked at them.

"What, in Heaven's name, can all these mean?" he muttered. "It looks like the council chamber of some hideous Chinese secret society! And what about the head? Who could have thrown it out of the window?"

"Well, it was thrown out, because there's the window with the broken pane," said Bray, pointing. "No, Jimmy; don't put that head back on the pedestal. We found it in the street, and we're not going to put it back while there's nobody here. That wouldn't be right at all!"

"I'm sick of the infernal thing!" said Jimmy. "It's getting on my nerves!"

"So is this room getting on mine!" said Bray. "We'll clear out, and explore the rest of the flat. If we can't find anybody, we'll hold a council of war on the spot, and decide what to do."

There were many other strange things to look at in this remarkable room, but Bray and Saville did not wait—they had seen quite enough to satisfy them. Going back into the hall, they found that there were only three other apartments in the flat—a kitchen, a bath-room, and a second bed-room. All were absolutely empty—that is to say, there was no sign of any human being.

Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray had the flat to themselves.

Without the slightest doubt this whole adventure was an extraordinary one. It was so remarkable that the two friends were at a loss to know what to do. The falling of the mummified head into the road had been startling enough; but to come up to the flat, and find it utterly deserted, was even more startling.

"Look here! We'd better not stay here a moment longer!" said Jimmy. "We might get mixed up into terrible trouble over it. It's all very well to come into these things, Hal, but it might be difficult to give a reasonable explanation. Let's get out while we're safe!"

They passed outside into the outside lobby, and were soon on the landing. They left the door of the flat slightly ajar. Everything was quiet. No sounds broke the stillness as they paused at the end of the stairs.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Jimmy softly.

"The best thing we can do is to find a policeman," replied Bray.

"That's what I suggested at first."

"I know you did; but things are different now," said Bray. "We've discovered all these wild and woolly facts. We've plumped right into the middle of a mystery that beats any I've ever read about. And, as you said at first, we can't do better than find a bobby and gently transfer the responsibility of that cheerful head on to his broad shoulders. Come on!"

They quickly descended the stairs, and a weight seemed to lift itself from their shoulders. That strange flat had got on their nerves more than they cared to admit. Outside in the street they looked up and down, but there was no sign of any living soul. And the time was just after one.

"Ten-to-one we don't find a bobby until we've walked a couple of miles," said Bray. "It's a queer thing how elusive these fellows in blue are! It doesn't matter which way we go."

They started off down Trevor Avenue, Jimmy Saville carrying the mummified head under his arm.

And, presently, they came into a wider thoroughfare. At the bottom of it a taxi-cab was coming along. But there was no sign of any policeman. The two young men walked quickly.

They had covered just over a hundred yards when they saw that the taxi-cab had come to a halt only a short distance ahead. Two figures had stepped out on to the pavement, and the taller of the pair was paying the taxi-man.

"Here we are!" said Bray crisply. "This taxi chap will help us, perhaps. Anyway, we can find a policeman more quickly in a taxi—I don't fancy waltzing round the houses for hours!"

They quickened their footsteps, but the taxi-cab was already shooting round within its own length, in the peculiar way that taxi-cabs have, and was speeding off down towards Oxford Street.

"Hold on!" yelled Bray. "Hi!"

They commenced running, and were now opposite the pair who had just discharged the vehicle. Jimmy Saville glanced at them, and then gave a sudden start of recognition.

"Hold on, Hal!" he exclaimed sharply. "By Jove! A ripping idea!"

We'll tell our yarn to this gentleman, instead of to a policeman—it'll be altogether better."

Bray expressed his astonishment plainly.

"Why, Saville!" exclaimed the taller of the two strangers. "I hardly expected to see you outside my door at this hour. How are you?"

"Oh, tremendously perturbed," replied Jimmy Saville. "This is my friend, Mr. Harold Bray. Hal, let me introduce Mr. Sexton Blake."

Bray's eyes lit up—he understood.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### "We've Put our Foot in it Properly!"

SEXTON BLAKE had met Jimmy Saville once or twice at his club, and he liked the young fellow well enough.

The famous criminologist had Tinker with him, and they had, as a matter of fact, just returned from the home of a friend in another part of London, where they had spent the evening.

"I'm sorry you missed that taxi-cab just now," said Blake, after he had exchanged a few words with the two young men. "But there'll be another one along soon, I expect, so—"

"Hold on, Mr. Blake—hold on!" interrupted Jimmy. "We've got something to tell you—something just in your line."

Sexton Blake smiled.

"Some intricate problem?" he asked, with a chuckle.

"Yes, Mr. Blake—you've used the very words," put in Bray. "I'll guarantee it's one of the queerest affairs you ever had in front of you. Jimmy and I are positively floundering in amazement and doubt."

"I'll bet you're trying to pull our legs!" grinned Tinker.

"Young man, I do not indulge in leg-pulling," said Bray severely. "And, under no circumstances, would I attempt such an undignified procedure with a famous gentleman like Sexton Blake."

"Honestly, Mr. Blake, we are serious," said Jimmy Saville earnestly. "Not half an hour ago we struck something extraordinary. In fact, we were just looking for a policeman when I saw you. I'd rather tell you all about it, and you can advise us what to do."

Sexton Blake looked at the two young men closely.

"You had better come up with me," he exclaimed. "If you really have something of interest to tell me, I shall be very pleased to listen."

"Good!" said Jimmy Saville. "What a lucky thing we spotted you, Mr. Blake."

The famous detective had the door open by this time, and the two visitors were ushered in, and they passed upstairs to Sexton Blake's comfortable consulting-room. Tinker switched the lights on, and busied himself with a few preparations—such as getting a box of cigars ready, and a whisky-decanter and a soda-siphon.

Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray were invited to make themselves at home, and they sat down in two easy-chairs, and Sexton Blake stood with his back to the fireplace. Tinker had disappeared for a moment, but soon arrived with Pedro, who was wagging his tail with delight.

"I thought he might as well hear the yarn, too!" grinned Tinker.

"I don't fancy there's anything for Pedro to do in this particular case," said Saville. "By Jove! What a fine dog! I've heard lots about him, but this is the first time I've had the honour to make his acquaintance."





Tinker solemnly took Pedro to the two visitors, and Pedro just as solemnly offered his huge paw. The ceremonies being over, Pedro betook himself to the hearthrug, flopped down, and gave his tail one or two lazy wags. Then he closed his eyes and went off into a nap.

"That shows how much interest he takes in the business," grinned Bray. "Well, go ahead, Jimmy. Kindly remember that it's after one o'clock, and we're losing all our beauty sleep. Mr. Blake probably wants to get to bed, too."

"You needn't worry about me," smiled Sexton Blake.

"Well, the fact is, Mr. Blake, we were strolling home to my chambers," said Saville. "We came up Baker Street, and then turned into Trevor Avenue—that's a short cut to my place, you know. And as we were walking along there was a sudden crash of glass, and this came down on the top of us."

Jimmy Saville suddenly produced the head from beneath a fold of his light overcoat. He had held it there, concealed, until this moment, and Sexton Blake had been wondering what the hidden object could be.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tinker. "What the dickens—"

"This is interesting," said Sexton Blake. "Let me have a close look, Saville. H'm! Quite unique!"

He turned the mummified head over and over in his hands, examining it with great closeness. Tinker, meanwhile, stood looking on, and he was beginning to realise that these two late visitors had not come on a fool's errand.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Blake?" asked Bray, at length.

"It is an exceptionally well preserved head," said Sexton Blake slowly. "I cannot exactly place the period, but, judging by the style of embalming, I should say that this head has been in this state of preservation for about twelve hundred years, and it probably came from an Inca tomb, or possibly from Yucatan. I do not think it is an Egyptian relic."

"It's rather queer how solid the thing remains," said Jimmy. "I always thought that these mummified things were fragile. But it bounced on the pavement like a football!"

Sexton Blake smiled.

"There are many ways of embalming which the ancients employed," he replied. "Until I have refreshed my memory I cannot say off-hand which tribe of people this head belongs to. In any case, it is quite an interesting specimen—particularly so as the head is complete in itself, being fully mounted."

"And you say this thing fell on the top of you?" asked Tinker, in surprise.

"It nearly brained Jimmy," said Bray. "I'll tell you all about it."

And he proceeded to explain the full facts. Assisted by Saville here and there, he went into all the details, describing how they had gone up to Flat No. 19, how they had found the door open, and the flat deserted.

Sexton Blake, meanwhile, listened with close attention. He was unusually interested, this affair presenting some of those bizarre aspects which always claim his curiosity. The very facts of the case, as related by the two young men, were singularly mysterious, and far removed from the common-place.

"Well, that's the yarn, Mr. Blake," said Bray, at length. "We were just off to find a policeman, and it was Jimmy's idea to tell you all about it. What do you think we'd better do?"

Sexton Blake stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, I hardly know at the moment,"

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he said. "As you intimated at first, the affair is indeed a peculiar one, and I do not blame you for being perturbed. You were wise to leave that flat without delay as soon as you found it was deserted."

"But can you account for it, Mr. Blake?" asked Jimmy. "The flat was empty, and yet the head was sent through the window out into the street. That couldn't have happened without human agency."

"Of course not!" interrupted Blake. "There was obviously somebody in the flat a few minutes before you arrived. Under the circumstances, discussion would be idle. I cannot see that we can serve any good purpose by going into the whys and wherefores of the case. One of a hundred things might have happened, and in all probability there is a perfectly logical explanation of the whole occurrence. But I freely admit that my curiosity has been highly aroused."

"Then what do you suggest, Mr. Blake?" asked Jimmy Saville.

"Well, I am reluctant to put matters into the hands of the police," said Sexton Blake. "There may be nothing criminal involved, so I do not think we should be justified in going to them. The only correct course, it seems, is to return this property to its rightful owner."

"But there's no rightful owner there!" protested Bray.

"We might go and have a look round, guv'nor," said Tinker eagerly. "I'm jolly interested in this business, and it may turn out to be something good. What do you say? Shall we go along and have a look at the flat in Trevor Avenue?"

"That is what I was about to suggest," said Sexton Blake, nodding. "We will go at once, gentlemen, and if the flat is still deserted, I will have a look round, and then decide what to do. We cannot determine anything until we have probed more deeply into the affair. By the way, Tinker, look up No. 19, Trevor Mansions in the directory."

Tinker walked across to a big book-case, took down a bulky volume, and turned over several leaves. Then he glanced up.

"Mrs. Horace Wigmore," he read out. "That's the name of the tenant, sir."

"H'm! That doesn't tell us anything," said Blake. "Probably Mrs. Wigmore has let her flat furnished. There are some hundreds of people who do that in the West End. Well, we will go along at once."

Sexton Blake, although he had not said so, was greatly struck by the peculiarity of this strange affair. There was something altogether extraordinary about it, and the famous detective's instincts were fully aroused. It seemed to him that here were the makings of one of those mysteries which he loved to probe.

Of course, there was the possibility that the thing would tumble to pieces as soon as it was investigated. But it was certainly worth looking into.

Within three minutes Blake and Tinker, with their two visitors, were striding up Baker Street in the direction of Trevor Avenue. They soon arrived, and found the big block of flats quiet and still. In one or two windows lights were gleaming, but for the most part the inhabitants were asleep. There was not a soul about.

Sexton Blake had the mummified head in a small handbag. He had intended questioning the night porter of the flats, but no such individual was to be found. As before, the entrance-hall was empty. Indeed, it seemed fairly certain that there was no night porter at all.

Mounting to the third floor, the

quartette arrived outside the door of No. 19, and Bray at once let out a soft whistle. The door was closed, and a bright light was gleaming through the ornamental frosted glass.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "The worthy Mrs. Wigmore has returned."

Sexton Blake pressed the bell-push and waited. Movements were heard at once, and the door was opened within a minute. But it was not a lady who stood there. The quartette were faced by a tall, well-built man of about forty-five. He was neatly attired, and had the appearance of a foreigner, with dark complexion and a short black beard. He wore heavily-rimmed glasses.

"You will pardon me for disturbing you at this hour of the night, sir," said Sexton Blake smoothly. "I think this is the address of Mrs. Wigmore?"

The stranger smiled, and shook his head.

"In one way you are correct," he replied, in a soft, well-modulated voice.

"Mrs. Horace Wigmore is the legal tenant of these premises, I believe, but at the moment they are in my possession, Mrs. Wigmore having let the flat, furnished, to me. I shall be greatly obliged if you will indicate the reason for your visit."

"Perhaps I'd better do the talking, Mr. Blake," put in Bray. "You see, Mr.—"

"My name is Brenner—Dr. Hulton Brenner!" interrupted the dark man. "But pray come in, gentlemen. It is hardly polite of me to keep you talking on the doorstep."

He retreated into the flat, and the others followed him. Jimmy Saville and Bray were looking somewhat astonished. Everything here seemed quite in order, and their extraordinary story, as told to Sexton Blake, struck them as being wildly exaggerated. But they had to go through with the thing now.

Dr. Hulton Brenner led the way into the luxuriously-furnished sitting-room which the two young men had looked into on their first visit. Dr. Brenner was very polite and charming in his manner. But Sexton Blake thought he could detect an underlying grimness which the others probably missed.

"It is very lucky that you found me awake," said the doctor, as he waved his visitors to be seated. "I happened to be reading a deeply interesting treatise on the effect of disease bacilli upon the corpuscles of human blood, and I really overlooked the time. I am afraid my man is asleep, and I must apologise for the absence of refreshments. If you will excuse me—"

"My dear sir, please do not trouble," interrupted Sexton Blake. "We owe you an apology for disturbing you at this hour. My name is Blake, and I was requested to call upon you by Mr. James Saville and Mr. Harold Bray, these two young gentlemen here."

The doctor raised his eyebrows.

"Oh?" he said inquiringly. "You have aroused my curiosity, Mr. Blake. I shall be greatly interested to know why you have called."

"The fact is, Dr. Brenner, we've come to return some property of yours," broke in Jimmy Saville uncomfortably. "When we called before you weren't in, and we hardly knew what to do. Happening to meet Mr. Blake, I suggested that he should come round with us, because—"

"Pardon my interruption, but I must confess that I am at a loss," said Dr. Brenner smoothly. "You called before, I think you said?"

"Yes, about half an hour ago."

"I think you must be mistaken," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I heard

(Continued on page 8.)





"By Jove! Don't you see?—The pedestal—the head must have stood upon it!" (Page 5.)

"One of those robed figures! It walked right in, and strode into my sitting-room!" (Page 11.)

Waldo did not pause to open the door. As he charged it buckled and split like match-boarding. (Page 24.)





no ring half an hour ago, and I have been reading—"

"But there was nobody here at all," interrupted Bray. "We found the front door ajar, and the flat was quite empty."

Dr. Brenner laughed softly.

"Really, my dear sir, you are quite mistaken," he said. "I am not in the habit of leaving my front door ajar, neither do I leave the flat to take care of itself. When I have occasion to go out, I always leave my servant in charge. With regard to this evening, I have been in the whole time."

Bray and Saville stared at one another.

"But—but that's impossible, sir!" exclaimed Bray. "We came here not much more than half an hour ago. We walked right in. There wasn't a soul about, and we brought that head up to return to you."

Dr. Brenner looked bewildered.

"There's surely must be some mistake," he said helplessly. "I cannot imagine what in the world you are talking about. I have been in this very room for the past three hours. You mentioned something about a head, I believe, and that remark is inexplicable to me."

Tinker nearly exploded as he glanced at the dismay which was written clearly upon the faces of Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray. It was only too obvious to Tinker that the two young men had got mixed up, and they had come to the wrong flat.

"But—but this is No. 19, isn't it?" asked Saville.

"It is."

"Man alive, I know it's the right flat!" ejaculated Bray. "Didn't we look into this very room? This is the same carpet, the same furniture—everything! I can't understand it, Dr. Brenner. Are you positively certain that you have been here—"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the doctor, with a slight touch of impatience. "Surely I ought to know whether I have been in my own flat or not! I repeat that I am altogether mystified by what you have told me."

Jimmy Saville took in a long breath.

"But—but what about the broken window?" he demanded. "What about the mummified head, and the room with the staring eyes?"

Dr. Brenner rose to his feet.

"Is this a practical joke?" he inquired stiffly.

"No, certainly not!"

"Then I should be greatly obliged if you will explain—and at once!" said the doctor curtly. "It is hardly pleasant to be knocked up between one and two o'clock in the morning to hear a fantastic story of this kind. I am a man of even temper, gentlemen, but you are certainly trying my patience!"

Sexton Blake was about to speak. But Jimmy was first.

"I think I'd better tell you exactly what occurred, Dr. Brenner," he said quickly. "My friend and I were walking down the street when there was a crash of glass—"

And Saville proceeded to explain everything in detail. He told Dr. Brenner the whole story exactly as he had told it to Sexton Blake. Finally he turned to the great detective.

"You've got the head, Mr. Blake," he said. "Please show it to the doctor."

Sexton Blake opened the bag, and produced the mummified head. It was rather a startling thing to bring forth so suddenly, and Dr. Brenner gave a quick exclamation, and stepped back.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated huskily. "What—what in the name of all that's hideous is this?"

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"But, hang it all, it's your own property, Dr. Brenner!" exclaimed Bray.

"My property!"

"Well, it came from this flat, and I naturally assumed it to be your property," said Bray. "Mr. Saville has explained the circumstances, and there's no need for me to go over them again. That head fell down upon us from one of your windows—"

"Nonsense!" broke in Dr. Brenner sharply. "You are talking ridiculous nonsense, sir! I have never seen the head before in all my life! Furthermore, I don't wish to see it! And I shall be obliged if you will take it away at once."

The two young men looked aghast.

"It seems that we have made a slight mistake," said Sexton Blake quietly. "On behalf of my young friends, Dr. Brenner, I tender my sincere apologies, and trust that you will forgive us for disturbing you—"

"Hold on, Mr. Blake; hold on!" interrupted Bray. "This is beyond me! I tell you we haven't made a mistake; Dr. Brenner himself must be at fault. He's probably been asleep, or something of that kind. But I'm willing to wager ten thousand pounds to a penny that this is the flat we entered, and—"

"I can only conclude, sir, that you have been drinking!" snapped Dr. Brenner acidly. "It pains me to speak so bluntly, but I can think of no other explanation. Why you should take this absurd story to Mr. Blake is quite beyond my comprehension. I am certain that he realises the absurdity of the whole thing."

"Rather, sir!" put in Tinker. "There's a bloomer somewhere, and that's a fact. I think we'd better retreat as gracefully as we can under the circumstances. We've put our foot in it properly!"

"If we had made a blunder, I should be the first to apologise," said Jimmy Saville grimly. "Your accusation, Dr. Brenner, is absolutely unfounded. Neither my friend nor myself have been drinking, and our story is true in every detail. This mummified head broke through one of your windows and fell down upon us—"

"And I say that the whole story is preposterous," interrupted Dr. Brenner. "Not merely preposterous, but wildly fantastic. I have never seen the head before, and there is not a pane of glass in this flat broken."

He suddenly broke into a soft laugh.

"But why should we quarrel?" he asked smoothly. "We mustn't let a little misunderstanding lead to high words. Honestly, gentlemen, you have made a blunder. But, even now, you still think that this is actually the flat you entered?"

"I am certain of it," said Bray bluntly.

"In that case, my dear young sir, I must do my best to disillusion you," said the doctor suavely. "You will please honour me by examining the flat, and I shall be most astounded if you find any sign of the extraordinary characteristics you have described. I am not in the habit of decorating my walls with grotesquely-carved faces with glaring eyes. Neither do I have mummified heads upon pedestals."

Bray looked round him.

"But this room—I recognise it all—" he began.

"You must remember, Bray, that sitting-rooms are very much alike, after all," put in Sexton Blake softly. "Honestly, my dear fellow, there is some mistake here, and I rather fancy that we owe Dr. Brenner a humble apology for disturbing him as we have done."

Dr. Brenner bowed.

"I am glad that you appreciate the position, Mr. Blake," he said.

Just for a moment their eyes met, and they remained gazing at one another for a few fleeting seconds. Then the faintest of faint smiles flitted across the doctor's face. Sexton Blake's own countenance was immobile.

"Come, gentlemen!" said Dr. Brenner briskly.

He led the way out into the passage, and paused.

"Now, which is this astounding room?" he asked, in an amused voice.

"This one!" said Bray, pointing to a door.

Dr. Brenner opened it, and switched on the electric-lights. Bray and Saville half expected to see that bluish-green glow. But, instead, the room was flooded with a brilliant white light, which proceeded from a heavy brass electrolier. And the apartment itself was singularly ordinary.

It was a dining-room, with a rich carpet upon the floor, a heavy table, with a thick plush cover, and a neat vase of flowers in the centre. The walls were neatly decorated with hand-painted panels, and a massive sideboard stood flush against one wall, the top of it carrying gleaming glass and glittering silver. Dr. Brenner waved his hand.

"Well?" he asked sardonically. "This is your mystery-room, is it not? This is your room with the pedestal and the black felt, and the green light? Oh, yes! And the broken window-pane—we mustn't forget that!"

He strode across the room, chuckling, and threw back the heavy plush curtains. And he revealed the fact that every window-pane was whole. Not even a crack was visible in any pane of glass.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Jimmy Saville huskily.

"But—but—"

Bray couldn't get any farther. Something seemed to fill his throat, and he suddenly felt horribly sheepish and self-conscious. He was aware of the fact that he had flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Oh, what asses! What prize asses!" muttered Jimmy.

For the realisation had come to him, too. In spite of their certainty, there was no doubt that they had come to the wrong flat! And all they wanted to do now was to flee—to get right out of it.

They babbled out their apologies, and lost no time in getting to the front door. Sexton Blake and Tinker followed them, and Dr. Hulton Brenner, smiling amusedly, saw them all to the door.

"Pray don't mention it, gentlemen," he said, as they continued their regrets. "These little mistakes will occur. It is nothing; you need not worry. I sincerely hope you will find the right flat, and return that interesting relic to its proper owner. Good-night, gentlemen; good-night!"

He closed the door, and Tinker grinned.

"And that's that!" he chuckled. "Oh, guv'nor, what a lark! I never felt such a fool before! I think we'd better take these two chaps and drop them down a drain! They've been spoofing us, guv'nor; they've been pulling your leg, and—"

"That brass plate!" muttered Jimmy Saville dazedly. "Look at it, Hal; take a good look at it! No. 19, as plain as the nose on your face! If this isn't the right flat I'll never believe in my own wits again!"

Bray looked helpless.

"I give it up!" he said wearily. "It's beyond me!"

They all descended the stairs, and passed outside into the quiet street. And there they paused, both Saville and Bray,





still in a state of chaos. They couldn't possibly understand the affair.

"You probably think we're a couple of fools!" said Saville quietly. "I don't blame Tinker for suspecting that we have been trying to work a practical joke upon you. Everything points to it."

"I should say it does!" said Tinker warmly.

"Dr. Brenner is a liar!" broke out Bray. "He lied like a bally trooper! That flat was the right one, and I'll swear to it! He was trying to put us off—"

"But what about that room, Hal?" interrupted Saville. "Dash it all, we can't get over that!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Bray. "That room! Yes, Jimmy, we can't explain that, can we? Less than an hour ago it was a place of mystic signs and glaring eyes, and now it's an ordinary dining-room!"

"I say, chuck it!" said Tinker. "What's the good of trying to keep it up, Mr. Bray? You can't spoof us, you know! Why can't you tell Mr. Blake the truth?"

Bray glared.

"That's what we have done, you young ass!" he snapped.

"Oh, rot!" said Tinker. "I suppose you made a bet with somebody, and faked up that yarn. The idea was to take the guv'nor off on a fool's errand. Well, you've won your bet, so you might as well tell us the true yarn now."

Bray clenched his fists.

"If there wasn't plenty of justification for your attitude, I'd wring your neck!" he exclaimed grimly. "Look here, Mr. Blake, can't you keep this young idiot quiet? We haven't tried to spoof you, and we've told you the absolute truth—just exactly as it happened. I've never been so mystified in all my life. If you want to investigate something really like a riddle, you'd better have a go at this!"

Sexton Blake smiled.

"I fancy we had better sleep on the facts at our disposal," he said pleasantly. "You'd better go straight home, and get to bed, and call upon me to-morrow. We'll have another chat then. We sha'n't do any good by continuing the discussion now."

"And what about the head, Mr. Blake?" asked Jimmy Saville.

"I'll take charge of it until the rightful owner can be found," replied Blake.

"Don't worry yourselves, my dear fellows. And let me thank you heartily for putting this most interesting problem before me."

"You really think it might come to something, then?" asked Saville.

"Most certainly."

"We haven't been trying to play a joke on you, Mr. Blake—honestly," went on Jimmy. "And, what's more, I'm becoming pretty well convinced that there's been some jiggery-pokery work here. I'm sure we went to the right flat at the very first. But that room! That's what I can't understand at all!"

"Well, Saville, don't concern yourself about it," said Sexton Blake. "It won't do any good, and it will only disturb your night's rest. Take my advice, and do your best to forget all about it. You can safely leave it in my hands."

The two friends parted with Sexton Blake and Tinker shortly afterwards, and continued on their way to Jimmy Saville's chambers.

Sexton Blake and Tinker remained looking after them for a few moments, and then Blake gazed up thoughtfully at the high buildings.

"Remarkable, Tinker—most remarkable!" he murmured softly.

Tinker stared.

"But you don't really believe that yarn, guv'nor, do you?" he asked in surprise. "You haven't swallowed it

whole, surely? It's my belief they were just trying to spoof you—"

"No, Tinker, you are quite wrong," interrupted Sexton Blake. "Saville and Bray were perfectly sincere—of that I am certain."

"Then they made a mistake in the number of the place."

"No they didn't."

"But—"

"If there has been any spoofing, it has been on the part of Dr. Hulton Brenner," put in Sexton Blake quietly.

"Our worthy friend with the black beard succeeded, up to a certain point."

Tinker was becoming interested now. "How do you mean, sir?" he asked.

"I mean that he was successful in hoodwinking you and our two young friends," replied Blake. "But Dr. Hulton Brenner was not successful in hoodwinking me. Come, Tinker, where is your marvellous power of seeing through a clever disguise?"

"Disguise?" repeated Tinker blankly.

They were walking along now, and had left the flats well behind.

"Yes, disguise," said Sexton Blake calmly. "We have met Dr. Hulton Brenner before, Tinker, and a most interesting personality he is, too. In fact, I might say that he is one of the most remarkable men who has ever pitted his wits against my own."

"Well, I'm blest if I understand," said Tinker flatly. "I've met Dr. Brenner before? When? Where?"

"It is some months since we had the pleasure of engaging in a battle with Dr. Hulton Brenner," said Blake. "He did not bear that name then, Tinker. He was, on the contrary, quite well known to us, and to the police, as—Rupert Waldo!"

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

"He Told Me I had Signed My Own Death-Warrant!"

TINKER jumped.

"Waldo—Waldo, the Wonder-Man!" he exclaimed quickly.

"But—but Dr. Brenner isn't Waldo, guv'nor!"

"Dr. Brenner is Waldo!"

"But—but he doesn't look a bit like him!" protested Tinker. "Ye gods and little fishes! Waldo! And we'd been wondering what had become of him these last four or five months. Why, only a fortnight ago, sir, we were saying he'd probably settled down to a quiet life."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Evidently a quiet life doesn't suit Mr. Waldo," he said. "Our amazing friend is up to some new game, Tinker, and I shall be most interested to discover what that game actually is. I shall certainly not let the matter stand over."

Tinker was still amazed. This disclosure was a surprising one for him. Sexton Blake had crossed swords upon several occasions with Rupert Waldo, that amazing criminal who had become well known as the Wonder-Man—owing to his extraordinary strength and physical peculiarities.

Waldo's muscular power was positively astounding, and it was well known that he knew no such thing as pain. A red-hot iron searing his flesh would cause him no inconvenience—he would not even feel it. Physical suffering was unknown to Waldo. There have been other cases of a similar character, but never one connected with such a clever personality as that of Waldo.

He was an astonishing man in many respects—clever, witty, and cool on all occasions. He was possessed of unlimited confidence, and he had never been known to lose his head, or get into a panic.

In fact, Rupert Waldo had the makings of a master criminal, and some of his exploits were staggering in their audacity and cleverness. He would have succeeded many times had it not been for the fact that Sexton Blake had stepped in.

And Waldo was never vindictive and savage because of Blake's activities. He respected the famous detective, and it was his one ambition to engage in a fierce battle of wits against Sexton Blake—and win. Up till now he had lost every time.

"But how can you be certain, sir?" asked Tinker, after a while. "Waldo! I've met him two or three times, but Dr. Brenner doesn't look a bit like him."

"The disguise is a particularly good one, Tinker," said Sexton Blake. "But, after all, disguise is only artificial. The eyes, the figure, and many other physical characteristics cannot be altered. I recognised Waldo in Dr. Hulton Brenner, and I think Waldo is aware of that fact, too. There are some interesting possibilities here, Tinker."

"And what about that story that Saville and Bray told us?"

"It was perfectly true in all details," said Sexton Blake. "I am convinced of that, young 'un."

"And what about that room?"

"Waldo was exceedingly smart. He changed the appearance of it with remarkable rapidity," said Blake. "Possibly it is prepared in such a way that it can be changed at short notice. How the head came to be flung from the window I don't know, and it would be quite useless for us to make conjectures. But I mean to devote myself to this problem at once."

"To-night, guv'nor?"

"Well, hardly to-night," smiled Blake.

But the astonishing affair was to be investigated that night, after all! Neither Sexton Blake nor Tinker had any idea of the singular events which were to develop. They had just turned into Baker Street, and their own house was two or three hundred yards down.

Tinker stared, and then uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo!" he said. "There's a car just pulled up outside our door, sir!"

"So I observe, Tinker," said the great criminologist. "H'm! Two o'clock! A somewhat early visitor, eh? It seems that we are not destined to get to bed quite yet. Let us hope this caller will not drag us away on a long journey."

"Well, it rests entirely with you, sir."

"No, Tinker, it rests entirely with the case," corrected Sexton Blake. "If it proves to be of no interest there will be no journey. If, on the other hand, I am attracted, there is no telling what will happen."

They walked up briskly, and found that the car was a neat two-seater, and that it had had only one occupant. This gentleman was now alternately pressing the electric bell-push and hammering vigorously upon the knocker.

Blake and Tinker regarded the stranger with interest. He was a big, bluff man, attired in a heavy motoring coat of considerable value. He hardly seemed to notice the pair coming along the pavement. His whole attention was centred upon battering at Sexton Blake's door.

"Infernal nuisance!" he muttered. "Must be out! Pah! Just when I wanted—"

"Pardon me, sir, perhaps I can be of some service?" exclaimed Sexton Blake, as he came to a halt opposite the step.

The stranger turned.

"Deucedly obliging, but I know my own business, thank you!" he snapped.





"It doesn't need two people to ring this bell or work the knocker."

"My name is Blake—"

"What! Mr. Sexton Blake?" shouted the other. "Please forgive me, Mr. Blake. I didn't understand. Splendid! I am indeed thankful to find you. I was just beginning to fear that you were out of town."

He thrust forward his hand and grasped Sexton Blake's with relief and fervour. His pleasure at seeing the detective was very obvious. But neither Blake nor Tinker knew the man from Adam.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, wiping his brow, "I am so agitated I have forgotten to introduce myself. And, by gad, I've forgotten to explain why I'm here at this unearthly hour! But I came to you, Mr. Blake, because I have an extraordinary story to tell—one that I hesitated at relating to the police. I am in danger of my life—even now, as I am talking to you, I may be struck down!"

"Come, come!" said Sexton Blake firmly. "That won't do, my dear sir! Perhaps you had better just come upstairs with us and explain the reason for your visit. I shall be most happy to hear your story."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake—thank you exceedingly!"

Blake already had his key out, and he turned.

"Perhaps you had better remain out here, Tinker, to watch the car—"

"No, no—not at all!" interrupted the stranger. "The car will take care of itself; I've no fear of it being stolen. And what if it is? It is a mere detail compared to the other terrible matter!"

They all passed into the house, and within a minute or two they were within Sexton Blake's consulting-room. Overcoats and hats were removed, and the three of them sat down.

Sexton Blake and Tinker could now see that their visitor was a man of about thirty-five, rather stout, and with a deeply bronzed, full featured face. A heavy military moustache adorned his upper lip, and this, combined with his manner, prompted Tinker to set him down as a major or a colonel.

But this was not the case.

"By gad!" exclaimed the visitor suddenly. "What on earth's the matter with me? I haven't introduced myself even now, Mr. Blake! I'm off my head, that's what's the matter! I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels! This infernal business has put me into a turmoil!"

He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a card, which he handed across to Sexton Blake. And the card bore this inscription:

"Henry R. Kennedy, Sunrise Cottage, Thornhill Lane, Hampstead."

"That's my name, sir," said Mr. Kennedy. "Very remiss of me not to tell you before. I have come to you, Mr. Blake, because I am in terrible danger—because I am sorely in need of advice and help. And I think you are the very man who can be of assistance to me."

"I hope I shall be able to help you, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake.

"I have been marked down!" said Mr. Kennedy mysteriously.

"Marked down?"

"By the Clan of the Seven Heads!" exclaimed the visitor.

"Dear me!" said Sexton Blake. "That sounds somewhat melodramatic, Mr. Kennedy. I confess that I have never heard of the Clan of the Seven Heads before—and I presume it to be some secret society."

"The most deadly secret society on earth, Mr. Blake," said Mr. Kennedy, with a hunted look over his shoulder. "Even now, as I sit here, I may be in danger! I have a terrible fear upon me—and even that should convince you of the reality of this menace. For I am a man who has hunted in all the wild corners of the earth. I have faced perils in savage lands. But this crumples me up—it robs me of my nerve. To feel that I am secretly threatened!"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"The fear of the unknown is always terrible, Mr. Kennedy," he said. "But perhaps you have been alarming yourself unduly. I have made it my business to become acquainted with every secret society in existence, and I certainly do not remember having heard of the Clan of the Seven Heads."

"Why, that's queer, guv'nor!" put in Tinker. "The seven heads? I wonder if—"

He broke off, and reached for the handbag which Sexton Blake had placed upon the floor. Tinker opened it, and took out the mummified head which had dropped from Dr. Hulton Brenner's window in Trevor Mansions.

Mr. Kennedy half-turned as Tinker did so, and he caught sight of the grisly relic—which certainly looked somewhat ghastly at first sight. The visitor gave a hoarse cry, and staggered back, sending his chair flying.

"Great Heaven above!" he gasped thickly. "What—what—"

"Please control yourself, sir!" interrupted Blake. "Confound you, Tinker! What on earth made you—"

"That—that is one of the signs of the clan!" panted Mr. Kennedy hoarsely.

"What does it mean, Mr. Blake? How does it come here? Heaven help me! Wherever I go I see some evidence of this terrible society's activity! I am doomed! Nothing in the world can save me!"

Tinker was rather scared by the effect of his action, and he hastily put the head back into the bag, and ran across to the sideboard and poured out a strong brandy. He handed this to Mr. Kennedy at once.

"Thank you—thank you!" said the visitor, gulping it down. "Ah, good! That's better—much better! Upon my soul, I had quite a turn! Please tell me what it means, Mr. Blake—that head! I—I—"

"I must confess that I do not know much about the head myself," said Sexton Blake. "It came into my possession in a peculiar way. But there is no need for me to enter into details at present. I am still waiting to hear your story, Mr. Kennedy. Please do not let the presence of that mummified head worry you."

"After I have explained you will realise my feelings upon catching sight of that dreadful thing," said Mr. Kennedy. "I have had a nerve-racking ordeal, Mr. Blake, and you must forgive me if I am somewhat incoherent and disjointed. Those masked figures keep appearing before me, and—and I fear that they might even surround this very house!"

"I should prefer you to begin at the very beginning, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake quietly. "Take your own time; there is no hurry. And I should prefer you to mention every detail."

Mr. Kennedy pulled himself together. "Infernal fool! That's what I am!" he muttered. "Just like a frightened child—and I don't mind admitting it, by gad! I've been through some queer experiences in my time, but this is the queerest of them all!"

He lit a cigar which Sexton Blake offered him, and then seemed rather more composed.

"I've always been a wanderer, Mr. Blake," he said, after a moment or two. "Africa, China, Peru—any out-of-the-way corner of the world, in fact. I've hunted cannibals in Papua, and I've faced death on the Congo. I don't spend much of my time in England—hate the place, in fact! That may sound unpatriotic, but you know what I mean. Town life bores me stiff. I'm an open-air man—always was. But when I drop into London I avoid hotels. At present I've got a comfortable little bungalow at Hampstead—cosy place. And I've an excellent cook who comes in daily, and a man to wait upon me."

"But at night you are quite alone?"

"Exactly! That's what I was going to say," said Mr. Kennedy. "I hate servants about the place at night, when I want to be quiet—detest the beggars, in fact! All right in their way, but that's all! Bless me, I keep wandering on, and I don't get any nearer the point! The first trouble with this infernal clan started just about a week ago, when I happened to get drunk."

"Drunk?" repeated Tinker.

"Yes, sir—confoundedly drunk!" said Mr. Kennedy grimly. "What's the good of concealing it? I don't often get into that state, and I'm not ashamed of it, anyway. I was at the club—the Wayfarers' Club, in Piccadilly. Been a member for years. Excellent institution. Talking with acquaintances, you know, and drinking too much—that was the cause of it. Anyhow, when I left I was deucedly unsteady, and rather worse than fuddled."

"Can you remember exactly what took place?"

"No. That's just the brutally bad part of it!" replied Mr. Kennedy gruffly. "I can only remember bits here and there. I know I got into a taxi, and I told the driver to take me home. Must have been a faked taxi, I suspect—the only thing I can suggest. If I'd have been sober it wouldn't have happened."

Mr. Kennedy glared at his listeners almost ferociously.

"But what did happen, sir?" asked Tinker, with interest.

"Yes, what happened? That's just it!" growled Mr. Kennedy. "I knew that I was in a taxi, but everything afterwards seems dreamlike and unreal. I remember being taken out of the vehicle, and led up some steps."

"What kind of steps?"

"Heaven knows—I don't!" said the other. "There it is, Mr. Blake. I was intoxicated, and when a man's in that stage he doesn't remember much afterwards. But what I do remember was this. I've got a hazy kind of recollection of being in an infernally queer room. Nearly everything was black, and there was a bluey-greenish light, and heads! Heads! Seven of them! One stuck in the middle of the room, and six on little brackets round the walls! Most uncanny experience—like a confounded nightmare!"

Sexton Blake leaned forward.

"Is that all you can remember about that room?" he asked keenly.

"There were faces, too—grotesque, ugly faces with glittering, staring eyes!" said Mr. Kennedy, in a tense voice. "But I don't vouch for these; they may have been mere figments of my imagination."

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tion. There were three or four robed figures, too—fellows in pale-blue gowns, which reached to their feet—gowns with painted heads on them. It was impossible to recognise who these men were, for they wore a peculiar type of head-gear that rose from the shoulders and went straight to a point, with just a couple of slits for the eyes."

"H'm!" said Sexton Blake. "Something like the official robes of the Ku Klux Klan, of America."

"Not at all, Mr. Blake—not at all!" said Mr. Kennedy. "I've heard of that affair—but this is different. Altogether different. These robed figures were doing a kind of sing-song business, and there was I, sitting in the middle—too infernally drunk to care much what happened, but still in possession of my wits."

"Do you know where this mystery room is situated?"

"I haven't the faintest idea—it might be Bayswater, Putney, or Streatham!" said the visitor. "I don't know the road, the house—I don't know anything."

Sexton Blake noticed that Tinker was looking at him eagerly—and Blake knew why. This story was strikingly reminiscent of the tale which Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray had brought. It was a remarkable coincidence that Mr. Kennedy should have called on this particular night.

Was it possible that this room he spoke of—the apartment of the seven heads—was really the mysterious room in Dr. Brenner's flat? Was Rupert Waldo, the wonder criminal, concerned in this astounding affair?

"It is unfortunate that you were in such a condition, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake quietly. "If you had only remembered the district, it would have helped us a lot. Well, pray continue—I am deeply interested."

"Glad to hear it, Mr. Blake—glad to hear it!" said the visitor, knocking the ash from his cigar. "What actually took place in this room I don't know—it's all mixed up. But I seem to remember a kind of ceremony, with chanting and singing, and all that sort of rubbish. Then I was in the taxi again, and I suppose I fell asleep. And when I woke up—when I woke up, by gad, I was lying on my own confounded doorstep, and it was just getting light."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Tinker. "What about your pocket-book and gold watch, and other valuables? All gone, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it, my boy—I hadn't been robbed of a farthing," said Mr. Kennedy. "There I was, unharmed, and no different from when I had left the club. Yes, I was different—I was sober, and my head was throbbing like hammers. Of course, I thought I'd dreamed it all—I took it for granted I'd had a particular nasty brand of nightmare. I went in, got to bed, and tried to forget the whole business."

"But that, I presume, was difficult?"

"Deucedly difficult, Mr. Blake," replied the other. "It was so vivid—and yet so indistinct, if you know what I mean. That sounds contradictory, but I'm no confounded good at explaining things—never was! I couldn't remember much, but the little things I did remember stuck. You understand? Those seven heads—the distorted faces with the glaring eyes. I can see them now!"

"Did anything happen the day after this adventure?"

"No, nothing; and I took care not to get drunk a second time, Mr. Blake. Once was enough for me, by gad! But the day after I received a letter. It came in the morning, by the ordinary post, and it was printed."

"Have you got it now?" asked Blake quickly.

"No—I burnt it."

"That's a great pity," said the detective.

"I didn't think it was of any importance then," protested Mr. Kennedy. "It was simply a sheet of notepaper, with these words in the middle: 'You are required to attend meeting at Headquarters at seven-thirty p.m. to-morrow—Saturday. Attendance is absolutely necessary. Do not fail!' That was all it said, Mr. Blake. I couldn't make it out. It was addressed to me personally, too."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Kennedy. "What could I do? I didn't know anything about Headquarters, or what the thing meant. I simply ignored it. That was on Saturday. Well, on Monday I had just settled down to read at about ten o'clock at night, when a hammering came at the door."

"By jingo!" said Tinker. "Who was it?"

"One of those robed figures!" said Mr. Kennedy impressively. "I can tell you, young man, it gave me a start! This figure walked right in, and strode into my sitting-room. And there he stood, with his eyes glittering through those slits. I knew, then, that that thing had actually happened—it wasn't a dream."

"You had a strange experience, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake.

"Strange!" echoed the visitor. "By gad, sir, it was staggering! This nightmare fellow got to the point without delay. He asked me why I hadn't attended the meeting, as directed. And then I made the appalling discovery that when I was drunk I had joined the Clan of the Seven Heads!"

"Great Scott!" said Tinker.

"I had become a sworn member," went on Mr. Kennedy huskily. "What was more, I had signed the Clan register! Of course, I scouted the idea, and told the man I would kick him out of my bungalow. I explained that I had joined while I wasn't in possession of my right wits, and that the whole thing was ridiculous."

"And what was his reply?" inquired Blake.

"He said that it made no difference," declared Mr. Kennedy. "I was a member, and there was no getting out of it now. The penalty for disobeying the orders of the Clan was death! I looked upon the whole thing as a lot of sensational nonsense, and told the fellow so."

"And he went without molesting you?"

"He told me that I was a member of the Clan of the Seven Heads, and that I must attend all meetings," replied Mr. Kennedy. "But, as I knew none of the Clan's secrets, it might be possible for me to escape."

"In what way?"

"He wouldn't say, and I offered him money," said the visitor. "I offered five hundred pounds to be released from my oath. He scouted the idea, and told me that the Clan never accepted money. This exploded my idea that the thing had been done as a trick to get money out of me. I refused to talk with him any longer, and gave him two minutes to clear out."

"And did he clear?" asked Tinker.

"He did!" said Mr. Kennedy grimly. "But as he went he told me that I had signed my own death-warrant. It made me think a lot—but nothing further happened until to-night. And that is why I have come to you, Mr. Blake."

"Because of what happened to-night?"

"Yes," said Mr. Kennedy. "I had been greatly worried over this uncanny occurrence, and I couldn't make head or

tail of it. Why should these people want to get hold of me? What good should I be to them as a member? They didn't want money, and they laughed at the idea. The only possibility that I can think of was that they required me to perform some dangerous mission, and that they could compel me to undertake it by this system of terrorism."

"That certainly seemed a feasible explanation," said Blake.

"And it proved to be correct," said Mr. Kennedy. "To-night I was just ready to go to bed. I returned late, after visiting a theatre, and it was between twelve o'clock and one. Well, I was just about to turn out the lights in my dining-room when, without any warning, the door opened, and two of those grotesque figures came in, with their conical headpieces looking like fools' caps. Before I could say a word, the window was flung open, and two more appeared. I was surrounded. These figures came upon me, and then two others put in an appearance, making six altogether. What could I do? I was hopelessly outnumbered. One man was dressed in more ornamental robes than the others, and he spoke in an easy, pleasant way."

"Waldo!" thought Tinker grimly. "The leader of the clan!"

"Well, this man told me that unless I obeyed the orders of the Clan of the Seven Heads, I should be executed without further delay," said Mr. Kennedy. "I was told that I was required to go upon a mission to the United States. The object of this mission was to murder a prominent member of the American Senate."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Tinker.

"I was appalled," said Mr. Kennedy. "I scouted the whole thing—I told this man and his crew to go to the deuce. And he told me in return that I should die within the hour if I did not agree. I was given twenty minutes to consider, and then they all vanished—they slipped out into the night, leaving me alone. By gad, Mr. Blake, you can imagine my feelings! Now I understood why I had been forced to join the Clan. I was to go upon this murderous expedition—"

"I've an idea, Mr. Kennedy, that was merely suggested in order to test you," said Sexton Blake. "I don't suppose for a minute that you would be actually required to go. I certainly do not think that this Clan of the Seven Heads is a political society—but a criminal one. The idea, no doubt, is to thoroughly terrify you, and then extract a very heavy sum of money from your banking account."

"I don't think so, Mr. Blake—I don't think so!" said the other. "In any case, I didn't wait to see. I stole out, and managed to elude these watchers. My little car is generally housed in a garage a short distance from the house. I succeeded in getting it out, and escaping. And I came straight to you—and that is really all I have to tell you. Please let me express my gratitude for the patient way in which you have listened to my singular narrative."

Sexton Blake lay back in his chair, and looked thoughtful for a few moments. His eyes were half closed, and he really appeared to be partially asleep. It seemed that he had no interest whatever in the surroundings.

"Well, Mr. Kennedy, your story has interested me deeply," he said at length. "It is quite evident to me that you have been victimised by this dangerous gang of criminals—for the Clan of the Seven Heads is, without any doubt, a criminal society. What is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to come back with me



to Hampstead," said Mr. Kennedy, rising to his feet. "If you think it is too dangerous, Mr. Blake, please say so. But you will do me a great service by coming. You may be able to pick up some clues—one never knows. And, in any case, I should feel far more confident if you were by my side. I am willing to pay you any sum that you might like to mention—"

"We need not speak of that now, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake. "Yes, I will come with you. I shall be most interested to look further into this matter. We will go at once."

Tinker jumped up. "No sleep for us to-night, sir," he said briskly. "But, still, that doesn't matter. This looks like being something special—particularly after what happened earlier. We'd better take our guns, too." Tinker knew well enough why Sexton

police with such a story, and Waldo knew it. It was too fantastic and wild—particularly as Mr. Kennedy would have to admit that he was intoxicated when the first event took place. And the victim of this plot would certainly not like the facts to become published, as they probably would be if the police got on the track.

By coming to Sexton Blake, Mr. Kennedy had avoided all this, and Blake himself did not grumble, because he was most anxious to get on the track of this new undertaking by Waldo. He could now do so in the ordinary course of his profession, and probably earn a nice little fee at the same time. Mr. Kennedy had come upon the scene just at the right moment.

Not that Sexton Blake was thinking of any financial gain. The great detective did not show many signs, but Tinker

pensively, and it was no doubt of very high rental. It was in total darkness when the little party arrived.

Mr. Kennedy was obviously agitated, but he did his utmost to conceal this.

"Those infernal beggars may be lurking about, waiting for me!" he muttered. "They're quite capable of it, confound them! Give me lions or wild elephants, and I'll go into the fray cheerfully. But this game fairly racks my nerves!"

They put the car away, and approached the bungalow. There was no sign of any living soul. They entered, and Mr. Kennedy switched on the electric light in the hall. It was very comfortably furnished, and looked cosy and warm. The night outside was somewhat chill, and a cutting wind was blowing.

The front door was closed, and Mr. Kennedy led the way straight into his

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Blake had consented to go to Hampstead with Mr. Henry R. Kennedy. It was because Waldo was the prime mover in this strange new game of his—the Clan of the Seven Heads was something quite fresh, and there was no doubt that Waldo was the chief.

And everything fitted in, too. This adventure had happened to Mr. Kennedy between twelve and one, and at that hour Dr. Hulton Brenner had been away from his flat. There could be no mistake about this business.

Tinker thought the same as Sexton Blake—that Mr. Kennedy had been selected because he was a rich man, and because there was a chance of fleecing him of a large sum of money. It was characteristic of Waldo to adopt some such novel scheme as this.

Mr. Kennedy could hardly go to the U.J.—No. 942.

knew quite well that his famous master was as keen as mustard upon following this thing up. After many months he had dropped upon Rupert Waldo again—an opponent whom Blake almost respected. It was a delight to him to be on this master crook's trail.

Without any further delay, Blake and Tinker got into their overcoats and hats, and led the way down into the street. Mr. Kennedy's car was still there, and he jumped into the driving-seat, and they were soon shooting down the silent and deserted streets in the direction of Hampstead.

Thornhill Lane proved to be a quiet country-like road, just on the edge of the Heath, where there were scarcely any houses at all, and where stately trees grew in profusion.

Sunrise Cottage was a picturesque little place—a modern bungalow, built ex-

isting-room, and a very comfortable apartment it proved to be. It was a room where one could lounge at ease, with luxurious chairs, and everything to cheer one. Books lay at hand, and the softly shaded electric lights had a warm glow.

"Well, Mr. Kennedy, we seem to be all right so far!" said Sexton Blake cheerfully. "I'll have a look round as soon as possible. I'd like you to tell me how these mysterious visitors came in—"

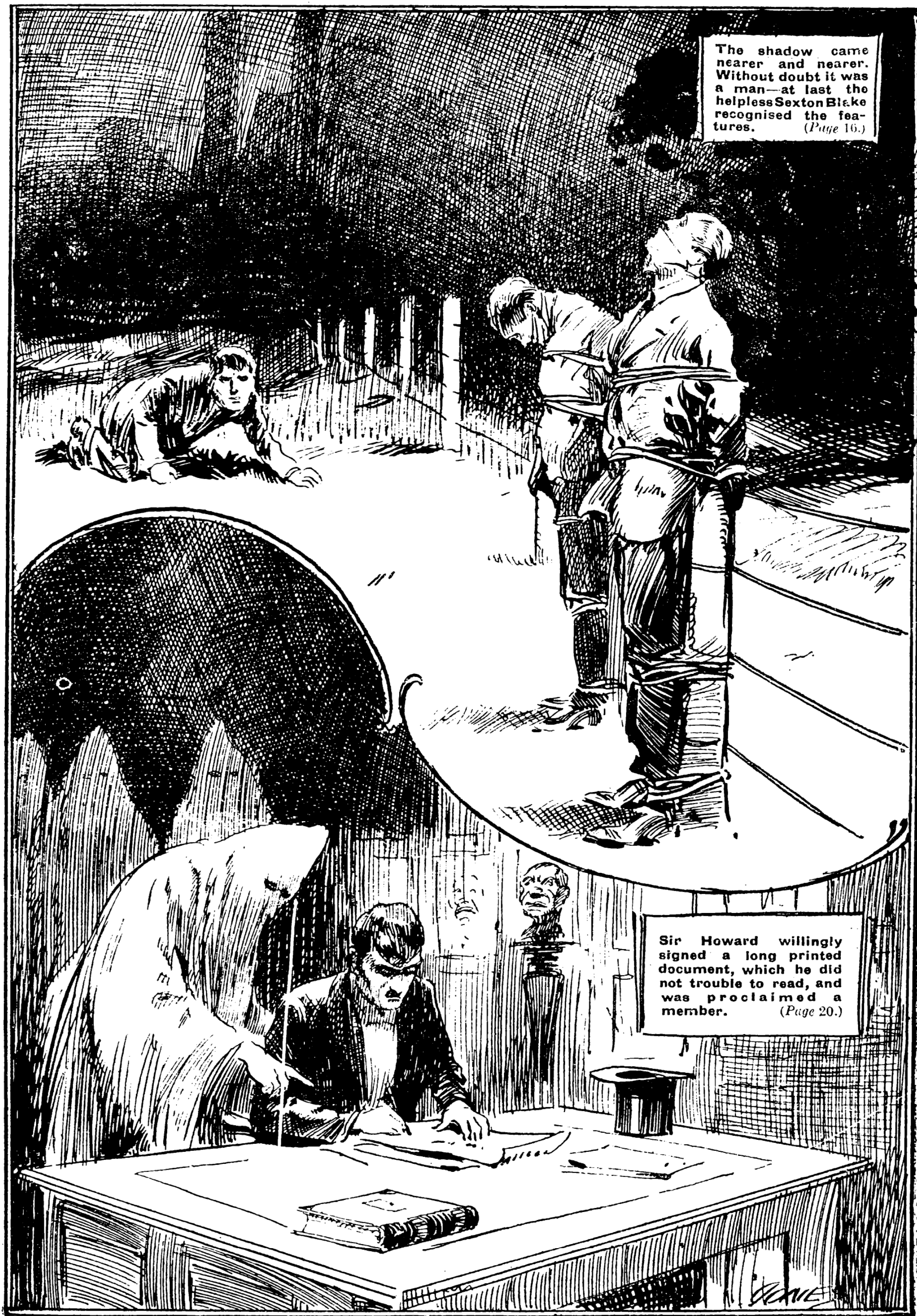
"Just a minute, Mr. Blake!" interrupted the host. "We might as well have a little tonic before we start. What do you say? I've got some special whisky in the cupboard."

"My dear sir, it doesn't matter—"

"Tut, tut! I insist!" said Mr. Kennedy, in his boisterous way. "Just

(Continued on page 14.)









wait a minute, and I'll bring it in. We might as well start properly, and we shall probably need a steadier, too!"

He bustled out, and they heard him enter one of the rooms at the back of the bungalow. Tinker looked at Blake curiously.

"What do you make of it, guv'nor?" he whispered.

"I hardly know yet, Tinker," replied Sexton Blake softly. "But it is evident that our friend has actually passed through the experience he talks about. Were it not for the fact that we had seen that mummified head, I might have cast a doubt upon the whole story—"

Crash!

From the rear of the bungalow came a sudden thudding crash, as though a table had gone over. Then there followed a wild cry in Mr. Kennedy's voice. Sexton Blake and Tinker became rigid.

"Help, help! Mr. Blake! Mr.—Help!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Tinker.

The cry was a startling one, and both Tinker and Blake were suddenly galvanised into activity. Just during this brief minute, while Mr. Kennedy had been alone, something had happened to him!

Blake tore out of the sitting-room, closely followed by Tinker. The passage was in darkness, but a light gleamed from beneath the crack of a door at the end, and this, obviously, was the door of the kitchen.

The detective reached it, and wrenched at the handle. But the door refused to budge. It was locked on the inside.

Blake tore at it furiously, but with no effect. He could not shift it.

"Shoot the lock, guv'nor!" panted Tinker.

"It's no good!" rapped out Blake. "The door's bolted as well—top and bottom. We shall have to get in by some other means—the window. Come, Tinker, there's not a moment to waste!"

They turned swiftly, and were just hurrying towards the hall door when it suddenly opened. A figure appeared, and the door was slammed behind it. Two revolvers were pointed accurately at Sexton Blake and Tinker.

"Hands up—and at once!" rapped out a cold, clear voice. "Make the slightest sound or any movement, and you will be shot down as you stand!"

Blake and Tinker stood perfectly still, and with upraised hands.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"I Never Make Terms With My Enemies!"

THE situation was a tense one.

Sexton Blake and Tinker stood with their hands above their heads, and that figure holding two revolvers remained motionless. And an extraordinary figure it was. Draped in a long flowing robe of some silken material, with grotesquely painted heads showing here and there. The sleeves were voluminous, and came right down over the hands. And from the shoulders there rose a funnel-like headdress, going up to a sharp point, like an inverted cone.

From two slits the eyes of the man within this costume glittered. And there was no doubt as to his grim intention. He held his revolvers without a tremor—one pointed at Blake's heart and the other at Tinker's.

"Understand, there must be no attempt to draw any weapon!" said the figure smoothly. "At the first sign of treachery I shall fire! Turn round, with your hands above your heads, and walk into the sitting-room. I shall be behind. Obey!"

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There was only one thing to do, and Blake and Tinker did it.

Without a word they turned and walked into the sitting-room. What had happened to the unfortunate Mr. Kennedy they could not imagine, but it was only too clear that their client had met with disaster.

Blake's blood boiled within him; but he knew better than to resist now. The time might come when it would be good policy to take a chance. But there was certainly no sense in taking any chance at this stage.

The robed figure glided silently into the sitting-room after Tinker and his master had entered.

"Blake, sit down in that armchair," said the figure, indicating a big chair with a movement of his revolver. "Tinker, remain perfectly still, with your hands up. And remember, if you make any move Blake will die!"

Tinker gritted his teeth, and remained still. The threat was enough for him. Sexton Blake sat down in the chair indicated, and the figure came close. He made a sudden, swift movement, and the next second Blake found his right hand securely fastened to the arm of the chair. Before he could realise what his enemy was doing, his left hand was secured to the other arm.

"Excellent!" said the cloaked form softly. "I rather fancy you are helpless now, Mr. Sexton Blake. As for you, young man, we will soon deal with you."

Tinker found himself seized in a grip of iron. He was forced into a chair, and treated in exactly the same way as Sexton Blake. His two wrists were secured by means of handcuffs to the chair arms. It was a very simple expedient, but exceedingly effective.

The figure gave a quiet chuckle, and moved towards the door. He stood listening for a few moments, and then came back. He closed the door softly, and faced his two victims.

"All quiet!" he said smoothly. "I rather fancy that Mr. Kennedy is safely dealt with. Those who refuse to obey the orders of the Clan of the Seven Heads suffer the extreme penalty."

"It sounds very nice, of course," said Sexton Blake calmly. "But I should be very interested to hear what your exact game is, Waldo."

The figure started, and then laughed softly.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed.

"Or, if you prefer it, Dr. Hulton Brenner," went on Sexton Blake. "I didn't think it necessary to keep the little secret, Waldo. I am becoming quite interested in this scheme of yours, although I am in the dark."

The robed figure made several quick movements, and then took off the head-piece of his gown, revealing a smooth, clean-shaven face—a face which was at once recognised by both Blake and Tinker.

The man who looked at them was Rupert Waldo, undisguised.

"You're clever, Blake—cleverer than I thought," said Waldo. "I took the trouble to disguise my voice, too. But you were put on the alert by that other incident, when you called at my flat. That was the worst piece of luck of all. You recognised me then. I knew it."

"Yes, I did recognise you, Waldo," said Blake.

"And so you put two and two together—quite a simple process," said the Wonder-Man. "Luck has gone against me. But you needn't think that you'll get the better of me in this little game of wits, Blake. This time I mean to beat you, and I tell you so frankly."

"If you do, it will be the first occasion on which you have won," said

Sexton Blake placidly. "As a matter of fact, Waldo, I wasn't certain as to your identity before you took that elaborate mask off. It was merely a chance shot of mine. I'm glad it went home, because now we can speak much more freely."

Waldo nodded.

"Of course," he agreed. "Well, Blake, how are you? It's quite a few months since we met, and I'm awfully interested in your affairs."

Waldo had not altered his character. The situation was decidedly a grim one, but he was talking as though they were two old friends meeting after a long parting. And Waldo was perfectly calm and at his ease.

"You rotter!" exclaimed Tinker fiercely. "If we'd only had a second longer, you wouldn't have got us like this. But you had us covered before we could draw our guns. It may be your trick now, Waldo, but you haven't won the game yet!"

"I rather fancy I shall, my dear Tinker," said Waldo. "Please let me apologise if I am causing either of you any inconvenience, but, as you see, it is necessary for me to be somewhat drastic. I can't afford to take any chances. Confound that sneak thief for putting you on the scent!"

"You mean Mr. Kennedy?" asked Tinker.

"Oh, no! I am very sorry for that unfortunate gentleman," said Waldo. "I was referring to a common housebreaker, who apparently got up the lift shaft of my Trevor Mansions flat. The fool evidently had a scare when he got into the room of the seven heads. What happened I don't know, because I wasn't there. But this brute must have thrown the head from the central pedestal through the window. That's what brought you round in the first place, Mr. Blake. And then Mr. Kennedy came to you immediately afterwards, with the net result that you now find yourselves in a nasty mess."

Sexton Blake did not reply for a moment. He knew that Waldo was speaking the truth. That head had been thrown through the window by an ordinary housebreaker, who had entered the flat while it was empty. In a sudden fright he had probably thrown the mummified head from him and had then fled, leaving the front door of the flat ajar. This he had done in order to avoid the slam.

"What have you done with Mr. Kennedy?" asked Blake quietly.

Waldo's smile vanished, and he looked grim.

"Mr. Kennedy asked for this trouble, and he has got it," he replied. "Exactly what my colleagues have done I do not know, but I'm afraid that Mr. Kennedy has suffered. It is the penalty of all traitors. Personally, I am in no danger, for this bungalow at the present moment is surrounded by eleven other members of the Clan. But it was a little conceit of mine to deal with you two single-handed."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"That is characteristic of you, Waldo," he replied. "I am disappointed. I always thought you were different from this. In the past you have performed several courageous and praiseworthy acts, and it was not a habit of yours to commit violence."

Waldo shook his head.

"I detest violence, Blake," he replied. "But in this instance it could not be avoided. Kennedy was obstinate."

"Have you killed him?" demanded Tinker fiercely.

"Personally, I have not touched him, but my companions may have been somewhat drastic," said Waldo. "If he is





dead I shall be very sorry, but I do not think matters are quite so bad as that.

"I am sorry you have entered into this business, Blake—deeply sorry. For I shall find it necessary to deal drastically with you, too. I wanted to avoid that. I have no quarrel with you, and it will pain me exceedingly to harm you."

"And what is all this Clan business?" asked Blake.

"You probably think that it is merely a game of bluff, but you are quite mistaken," said Waldo grimly. "Hitherto it has been my habit to work alone, but that system has always failed me. I have forsaken it. Two or three companions was not to my liking, and so I gathered several thousands to my beck and call. You are now standing before the High Chief of the Clan of the Seven Heads. It is the most powerful secret society that has ever existed, and before long its exploits will be talked of throughout the civilised world."

"At present it is so secret that I have heard of it for the first time to-night," said Sexton Blake drily. "You have altered your tactics, Waldo. I do not think it will bring you much gain."

"Unfortunately, you are not in a position to know the full truth," said Waldo. "This Clan of the Seven Heads is secret—absolutely so. It has members in every town in the kingdom, and the organisation is so complete that I can arrange coups and have them carried out without a flaw. Our campaign has hardly commenced, but before long the sign of the Seven Heads will be dreaded in every quarter of the land!"

"You are evidently ambitious," said Sexton Blake quietly. "But I am more than surprised, Waldo, and I do not fancy this new method of yours will bring you much success."

"You think not?" said the master crook. "You do not seem to realise what it means, Blake. From my own personal point of view it is infinitely better to work with colleagues. Have you considered what will happen if I fall foul of the police and get myself arrested? Within twelve hours I shall be rescued. Within twelve hours a thousand members of the Clan will be at work. No matter what prison I am in, no matter how closely I am guarded, the Clan will effect my release, and those responsible for my capture will be dealt with."

"Is that just a little hint for me?" smiled Sexton Blake.

"You may take it as you wish," replied Waldo. "But I should advise you to heed my warning, Blake. Our organisation is complete in every particular. As I have said before, I admire you, and my last wish is to quarrel with you. Look here, can't we come to some arrangement?"

"I never make terms with my enemies," said Blake casually.

"My dear man, I'm not talking about terms; and I do not look upon you as an enemy in any case," said Waldo. "You stand for law and order, and I stand for the opposite. Yet we have never actually quarrelled. Can't you keep out of this business, Blake? I don't want to hurt a hair of your head, or Tinker's, either. There's one way in which you can walk out of this bungalow now, without being harmed."

"And how is that?"

"You have merely to give me your word of honour that you will drop this case—that you will not pursue your inquiries in any direction," replied Waldo. "Give me your word, Blake, and I will release you within one minute, and you can walk away, and you will never be molested by the Clan. It is all in your favour. You are taking no chances. I've got you in my power at present, but I

don't want to take advantage of the fact. One word will be enough."

"And what if I break my word after giving it?"

Waldo smiled.

"I know you too well, Blake," he said. "Your word is good enough for me. Give it to me now, and there will be no further trouble."

"You are very generous, but I am afraid I cannot fall in with the suggestion," said Sexton Blake grimly. "It is not my habit to quit, as the Americans put it. No, Waldo, I go through with this case, and I tell you frankly that I shall do my utmost to deliver you into the hands of the police."

Waldo sighed with real regret.

"I was expecting that," he said gruffly. "Well, Blake, I'm downright sorry. You mentioned that you are going through with this case. No, Blake; you are through with it already. As far as you are concerned this case is finished."

"I would prefer that to any other method," replied Blake.

Waldo shrugged his shoulders, and came forward. He searched Sexton Blake's pockets, and removed the detective's revolver, transferring it to his own person. Then he disarmed Tinker in the same way.

After that he went to the door and opened it. He gave a soft, low whistle, with a very peculiar note. Tinker expected to see other members of the Clan come in, and the lad was wondering what the next move was to be.

But he was not allowed to see anything further. For Waldo came gliding over towards him, and the master crook now held a peculiar little object in his hand. It resembled a miniature scent-spray, with a tiny bulb.

"Forgive me, Tinker, but it is necessary," said Waldo softly.

He pressed the bulb, and a spray of whitish vapour came out of the nozzle of the instrument. Tinker gasped for breath, his senses reeled, and everything went black and dim.

Sexton Blake saw this, and he clenched his teeth. And when Waldo repeated the operation with Blake, the latter did his utmost to deceive his enemy. He took care to breathe in none of the spray, and he pretended to swoon off.

"That won't do, old man!" said Waldo amusedly. "I've been tricked like that before. I'm up to your little games."

Blake made no reply, and Waldo used more drastic methods. He waited, watching closely. And, after a few moments, Nature forced Sexton Blake to take in breath. Waldo pressed the bulb quickly, and this time there was no doubt about the genuineness of Blake's swoon.

How much time passed neither Blake nor Tinker knew, but they both seemed to recover their wits at the same time. They were out in the open, with the cold night air blowing upon their faces. It was pitchy dark, and it was impossible to see clearly. Something dim hovered in front of the pair.

This dim something was Waldo, still attired in his Clan garb. He held a little pad in his hand, and he had been holding this to Blake's mouth and nose—after having performed the same service to Tinker.

And now the pair were practically themselves. They felt very little after-effects of the anæsthetic, which was obviously of a harmless character. But, curiously enough, although their wits had returned, they had found it impossible to move their limbs. For a dreadful moment Tinker thought that he was paralysed.

Then he discovered the truth.

Just behind him there was a wire

fence, with wooden uprights at intervals of about five feet. And Tinker was bound hand and foot to one of these posts, with his hands behind him, and round the upright.

To move was absolutely out of the question, for the binding had been done effectually. Both Tinker and his master were as helpless as a pair of trussed fowls. They could not even move an inch.

"You needn't wait now; I can do the rest!" came Waldo's voice. "Get back to the bungalow, and keep watch."

Tinker strained his eyes, and thought he saw some dim movements among the bushes. Then Rupert Waldo turned, and faced his two victims.

"I thought I would have a word with you before parting," he said. "In addition, there is one little operation I must perform. This particular spot is quiet and secluded; but, only a hundred yards away there happens to be a main road. We're just on the edge of the Heath. How do you feel, Blake?"

"I would prefer to have no conversation with you, Waldo," said Sexton Blake curtly. "You have the upper hand, and it would be idle for me to dispute that fact. Go ahead with your infernal plans as soon as you like."

The Wonder-Man nodded.

"This unfortunate affair is not of my making," he said. "You have been obstinate, Blake, and I have taken the only course possible. Since organising the Clan I have become hardened. I have decided that it is useless to be merciful. And so I am taking measures now which will place you out of the running for all time."

"You mean to murder us?" asked Blake quietly.

"Exactly!" said Waldo, with perfect calmness. "Why should I object to the term? It is really the only word which fits in. The time now, Blake, is just three-fifteen, and you will be greatly interested to learn that both you and Tinker are connected by high-tension wires to a control box—or whatever they are called—of the local Electric Light and Power Company. You understand? You know the boxes I mean—square iron affairs standing on the edge of the pavement."

"Yes, I quite understand," said Blake.

"Well, I happen to know that at three-thirty to the minute every night there is a change over at the power-station," continued Waldo. "At present you are connected to dead wire in this control-box. At three-thirty, when the change over takes place, those wires will become alive. It is you who will be dead!"

"You—you mean to electrocute us?" gasped Tinker, horrified.

"It is the simplest and cleanest way," replied Rupert Waldo. "In just over thirteen minutes your end will come. It will be swift and sudden—and painless. When the cable becomes charged with current the pair of you will know no more. I have chosen the most humane method of dealing with you."

It was a ghastly scheme, and Tinker felt sick at heart. There was no escape for him, or for Sexton Blake. And yet how simple the whole idea was! It was characteristic of Waldo to think of something of this nature. It could not possibly fail if the wiring had been performed correctly—as no doubt it had. The change-over at the power-station was a certainty, and nothing could stop it. And then, when those dead wires became charged with current, the end would come in a flash.

Sexton Blake remained perfectly calm, and made no comment. He knew how useless it was to argue with his captor.





Once Rupert Waldo made up his mind, once he started out on a certain line, he went through with it.

"There is still one chance left," said Waldo softly. "It is not too late for you to give your word, Blake. Nothing would please me better than for you to save Tinker and yourself by agreeing to drop this whole case."

"I will make no bargain!" replied Blake curtly. "You can go ahead with your scheme, Waldo."

Waldo said no more. He produced a thick gag, and proceeded to bind it round Sexton Blake's mouth. Having done this to his satisfaction he gave his attention to Tinker. Then he pulled the funnel-like headgear over his face, and stole silently away into the darkness of the night.

Tinker could not even look at Blake, for his head was bandaged in such a way that he could hardly move it. And he could not speak. He was obliged to remain here, motionless, waiting for the end.

He counted the seconds as they passed, and his mind was tortured by the uncertainty of it all. How long would this ordeal last? It could only be about nine or ten minutes now. The minutes were slipping away.

In vain both Blake and Tinker wrenched at their bonds. But they knew from the start that their efforts would be useless. Even if they had had ten hours in front of them instead of ten minutes, they could not have succeeded.

The events of this amazing night crowded through Tinker's mind in bewildering succession. First the meeting with Jimmy Saville and Harold Bray, and the story of the mummified head which had been flung through the third-storey window. Then the visit of Mr. Henry Kennedy, and the journey to Hampstead.

Hampstead! It seemed impossible that these bizarre happenings could have taken place almost in the heart of London. Even now, as Sexton Blake and Tinker waited for the end, there were houses within sight—a main road lay within call. But in this darkness, in the small hours of the morning, the pair might as well have been a hundred miles from civilisation.

They were in a backwater—tucked away on the outskirts of the Heath among these bushes. In the day-time, perhaps, they might have been seen by some wary-eyed passer-by. But now, at this hour, not a living soul was in the vicinity—except Rupert Waldo and his strangely-attired accomplices. The only human beings near were those members of the Clan of the Seven Heads.

It seemed to Tinker that the full time of grace must have elapsed. He found himself holding his muscles tense and alert, as though there was some possibility of resisting the powerful current when it came into the wires. There was something particularly awful about this ordeal.

If they could have seen something—a clock-face which revealed the time as the minutes sped by. It would not have been so bad under such conditions. But they didn't know what the time was, they could only guess. And at half-past three the dead wires would become charged with powerful electric current. Surely it must be close upon three-thirty even now!

And then, out of the darkness, came a shadow.

Blake was the first to see it, and he stared. Then Tinker also became aware of it. U.J.—No. 942.

of that dim, elusive shadow, which, at first, might easily have been a mere figment of the imagination. But it came closer, creeping from behind the bushes. And yet it wasn't creeping, after all. The shadow seemed to be dragging itself along with great difficulty.

It came nearer and nearer; yes, without a doubt it was a man. And, at last, he swayed and staggered to the spot where Sexton Blake was tied to the fence. And, in dense gloom, Blake recognised the newcomer.

It was Mr. Henry Kennedy!

"By gad, so here you are!" gasped Mr. Kennedy breathlessly. "Infernally pleased to find you, Mr. Blake; was thinking all sorts of things, by gad! Thought you'd met with disaster. Soon have you out of this fix!"

Tinker nearly burst a blood-vessel. Mr. Kennedy evidently didn't know of the real danger, and he was fumbling in his pocket quite leisurely. And yet it must be three-thirty already!

At last Mr. Kennedy produced a pocket-knife. There was a further delay

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in undoing this, for his left arm appeared to be out of action. It hung limply by his side, and now and again he would wince in agony.

With a few slashes he freed Sexton Blake's hands. The detective tore the gag from his face, and drew in a deep breath.

"The wires—cut the wires!" he panted. "They are connected with the high tension current, and the power might be turned on at any moment."

"Good lor'!" gasped Mr. Kennedy.

His voice was weak, and it was quite clear that the unfortunate gentleman was not capable of quick action. But Sexton Blake had his hands free now, and in a moment or two the detective had liberated himself completely, and he tore desperately at the wires which had connected Tinker and himself to the control-box. These wires ran along in the grass, in the direction of the main road.

With one huge heave, Blake snapped them completely—and the danger was over. And the time was exactly three-thirty—all but twenty seconds!

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

**"Mr. Blake Will Remain in This Position for Two or Three Days!"**

TINKER breathed a great sigh of relief.

"My goodness!" he ejaculated. "I thought it was all up with us, guv'nor! Thank Heaven Mr. Kennedy came in time!"

"It's fortunate that things have turned out in this way, Tinker," said Sexton Blake. "I shall be most interested to hear from Mr. Kennedy what actually happened to him, and how he was able to come to our rescue."

"I can explain quite easily, Mr. Blake," said the other weakly. "It is more by luck than anything else that I was permitted to know of your peril, and I cannot express how thankful I am that I have been of some service. If those brutes had harmed you, I should never have forgiven myself. Are you sure those wires are all right?"

"Quite sure," replied Blake. "There is very little possibility of their being touched by anybody before the morning, and by that time they will be disconnected."

"But can't we disconnect them now, sir?" asked Tinker.

"With the current on?" said Blake. "I fancy not, young 'un. I shall ring up the power-station when we get home, and give them all the necessary information. It is for them to put things right."

Both Tinker and his master were free now, and they were feeling none the worse for their startling adventure. But Mr. Kennedy was not so fortunate, by all appearances. He had sat down upon a bank, and was silent. Then, as Sexton Blake was about to address him, he swayed curiously.

"There's something wrong with him, sir!" said Tinker hurriedly.

"It's—it's all right—nothing much," muttered Mr. Kennedy. "This infernal wound—loss of blood. Confounded nuisance—"

His voice trailed away, and he sagged back. But Sexton Blake was by his side in an instant, supporting him. Tinker held an electric torch, and flashed it on. Then he uttered a little cry of horror. For he and Blake were now permitted to see something which had not been noticeable in the darkness.

Mr. Kennedy's left forearm was smothered in blood! It was an awful sight, and Blake quickly picked up the arm and examined it. Just in the fleshy part, between the wrist and the elbow, a bullet-wound was apparent. It had been bleeding a great deal, and had not even been attended to. Some of the blood had dried, and there was little wonder that Mr. Kennedy had winced with agony.

"Great Scott!" muttered Tinker. "And he came to our rescue like this!"

"Quick, my lad—some water!" snapped Blake briskly. "There's a little brook a few yards away, I fancy. I heard the trickle over towards the left. Hurry up!"

Tinker dashed off, and soon returned with his hat brimming with water. Before much of it had time to escape, Blake produced a clean scarf, and gently washed the bullet-wound. Then he applied some antiseptic from his pocket medicine-case, and bandaged the arm.

"That will do for the moment, Tinker," he said. "Some brandy now."

He took out his flask, lifted Mr. Kennedy forward, and forced some of the spirit into his mouth. Mr. Kennedy gulped it down. And then, as Blake was holding him, he felt something moist on the patient's shoulder.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is worse than I thought!"

"It's nothing, Mr. Blake—don't trouble!" muttered Mr. Kennedy shakily. "Just a graze—painful, but harmless. By gad, we've tricked those rogues—"

"Please don't strain yourself, Mr. Kennedy!" interrupted Blake. "We'll soon have you fixed up."

Tinker fetched some more water, and, meanwhile, Sexton Blake turned back the patient's jacket, and revealed a rather nasty furrow on his shoulder. It had evidently been caused by a bullet. Several inches lower, and the damage would have been serious. Blake soon had this second wound bandaged.

"Awfully decent of you! I'm all right now, thanks," said Mr. Kennedy, breathing rather hard. "They caught me properly, didn't they?"

"It might have been far worse, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake gravely. "If you are feeling strong enough, I should like to hear a few details. What actually happened to you when you went out into the kitchen? Don't speak unless you feel that you can do so—"

"My dear sir, there's no need to worry—I'm





all right now," said Mr. Kennedy, struggling into a more upright position. "Gad, that shoulder hurts, though! I'm a crock, Mr. Blake—an infernal crock! Confound those brutal hounds!"

He took another swig of brandy, and then went on.

"When I left you in the sitting-room I'd no idea the enemy was so near at hand," he continued. "I'd only just got into the kitchen when one of those masked figures appeared before me. I yelled out, and as I did so the man fired his revolver—twice. But both his shots failed, as you see. They only inflicted flesh wounds."

"But we didn't hear any reports, sir," said Tinker.

"That's not surprising at all," said Mr. Kennedy grimly. "This fellow used a silent weapon—an air-pistol, I suppose. It simply made two faint sounds, like thuds. I staggered back, more scared than hurt, and I tripped against the table. The next moment I was over, and the back of my head had an argument with the cast-iron knob of the oven door. The cast-iron knob won, by gad!"

"You were stunned?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Mr. Kennedy. "I don't know what happened immediately afterwards, but—No, no! Don't trouble now, Mr. Blake—it's only a slight graze and a bump, I believe—"

But Blake wouldn't listen to him, and he forthwith proceeded to examine the back of Mr. Kennedy's head. He was glad he had insisted, for a very nasty wound was found. The patient's scalp was badly torn, and the hair matted with dried blood. The wound itself was still slightly bleeding, and Blake patched it up as effectively as possible under the circumstances. Mr. Kennedy had been knocked about severely, and it was rather a wonder that he had been able to come to the rescue of his friends.

"I think those beggars took me for dead," he went on. "Anyway, five or six of them came into the kitchen after I had recovered consciousness, and they all looked at me—but not too closely. They took it for granted that I was done for."

"But how did you get away, sir?" asked Tinker eagerly.

"I heard them talking, and then I found out that you two were in their hands, and were being carried off," said the other. "The kitchen was left deserted, and so I crept out, expecting every moment to be recaptured. Don't exactly know how I did it, but I found myself in the garden, and I kept crawling on into the darkness."

"And how did you locate us?" asked Blake.

"More by accident than anything else," replied Mr. Kennedy frankly. "I was crashing among the bushes, when I heard footsteps. And then one of those masked figures came striding along. He'd been keeping to a little path, and I guessed that he'd been giving you some attention. So I came along the same way."

"Excellent!" said Sexton Blake approvingly. "I have to thank you heartily for your services, Mr. Kennedy—"

"Nonsense—sheer nonsense!" muttered the other. "Good gad, aren't you doing all this for me? Nearly getting yourselves killed, and goodness knows what else! Nothing to thank me for!"

Then suddenly Mr. Kennedy changed his note.

"But what shall I do?" he went on, terror creeping into his voice. "I'm in danger, Mr. Blake—ghastly danger! It will mean death to go back to the hovel, and those hounds might be surrounding us even now!"

"We must get away somewhere at once!" said Sexton Blake grimly. "You are certainly not safe here, Mr. Kennedy—and your wounds need proper attention, too. Something must be done without delay."

"I have only you to lean on, Mr. Blake," said the other quietly. "I have nobody else to turn to. If you could protect me, I should be overwhelmingly grateful. It's the darkness I'm afraid of—the darkness! In the daytime these brutes cannot touch me, but at night they are everywhere—surrounding me, watching my every movement! Let me come home with you, Mr. Blake—"

"Certainly! I was about to suggest the same thing," said Sexton Blake crisply. "We will return at once to Baker Street, and I can promise that you will be safe there, Mr. Kennedy. Sleep would do us all good, and to-morrow we can pursue our investigations with confidence."

"That's the idea, sir!" said Tinker. "There's no sense in trying anything else to-night. With all these murderers about we don't stand an earthly. In fact, I'm a bit dubious as to whether we shall get clear even now!"

But Tinker's fears were groundless.

He and Sexton Blake supported Mr. Kennedy between them, although the latter protested strongly, declaring that he was quite fit enough. His left arm was in an improvised sling, but it was quite obvious that he was in great pain. For he kept his teeth clenched, and now and again he breathed very hard to keep back a groan as his arm was jarred.

After walking some distance over the Heath a lighted thoroughfare was reached, and then there was very little danger of being molested. Another fairly long walk, and the trio found themselves in Hampstead itself.

It was now well past four, and there was no likelihood of getting a taxi or any other public vehicle. But they were lucky, after all, for a big commercial lorry came thundering by. They stopped it, and the driver had no objection to giving them a lift, particularly as a five-shilling tip was forthcoming.

He even went slightly out of his way, and dropped his passengers just against the Marble Arch. And from here, of course, it was only a few minutes' walk to Sexton Blake's address in Baker Street.

They were glad enough to sit down in the great detective's consulting-room. The events of the past few hours seemed more like a nightmare than an actual reality. And here there was peace and quietness, and a feeling of solid security.

Tinker was not in the habit of drinking spirits, but he gladly helped himself to a small dose of brandy, which steadied him a



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lot. Then he assisted Blake in the laboratory, where Mr. Kennedy's wounds were carefully attended to.

"I am deeply grateful to you, Mr. Blake—deeply grateful!" said the patient. "What I should have done without your aid I do not know—I daren't think, by gad! But I'm safe here—safe from those confounded rogues!"

"You must go to bed at once, Mr. Kennedy," said Sexton Blake. "You, too, Tinker. I shall follow almost at once. We must get all the sleep we can so that we shall be fresh for to-morrow's work—and we are likely to have a heavy day. Will you follow me, Mr. Kennedy?"

The latter was glad enough, for he was tired and weary, and, indeed, in no fit condition to be active. He was escorted by Blake to a comfortable spare bed-room, and the detective assisted him in disrobing—for Mr. Kennedy was greatly handicapped by his wounded arm and shoulder.

Tinker lost no time in getting into bed, and he was soon asleep. Well before five, Blake was in his own bed, too, and the house remained in darkness and silence. It was still some little way from dawn, and Mrs. Bardell would not be getting up until six-thirty, at the earliest.

At half-past five the whole household was slumbering, and it really seemed impossible that any danger could overtake the sleepers. But if they had been awake and alert, they would have been astonished by the visitor who arrived just a minute or two after five-thirty.

where he came from it was impossible to say—how he had gained admittance was a puzzle. But Rupert Waldo was capable of extraordinary things! For surely it could have been nobody else—this mysterious figure garbed in the flowing cloak of the Clan of the Seven Heads.

It moved like a shadow into Mr. Kennedy's room; it moved like a shadow out of it. Then, in the same stealthy, silent manner the figure visited Sexton Blake's sleeping apartment, and then Tinker's.

Finally it vanished, presumably going the same way as it had come.

And the house remained in silence.

The dawn came, and shortly afterwards there were signs of activity. Doors opened and closed, footsteps sounded on the stairs, brushes and brooms were brought into operation.

Mrs. Bardell bustled about, and she did not fail to notice the overcoats and hats upon the stand. She knew that Sexton Blake and Tinker had returned, and it was therefore her duty to have breakfast ready at the usual hour. It was quite probable, in fact, that Mrs. Bardell was unaware that Blake and Tinker had been out at all.

By eight o'clock she had everything ready, and she was rather astonished by the fact that no sound of movement came from upstairs. Both Blake and Tinker were generally up and about by eight o'clock, and on the rare occasions when they did sleep late, Mrs. Bardell was always warned in advance.

By half-past eight the housekeeper was more than curious—she was mildly astonished. She even went upstairs and listened outside Sexton Blake's door. She even ventured to tap, but received no reply.

"Queer!" murmured the good lady, frowning. "I've never known Mr. Blake to be as late as this before! I suppose the poor gentleman has been working himself too hard, and right well he deserves a good sleep for once!"

She passed on to Tinker's room, and tapped again. But Tinker gave no response. And Mrs. Bardell ventured to softly open the door and glance in. Tinker was lying in bed, sleeping peacefully, by all appearances. But he was exceedingly still as he lay there, with the bedclothes slightly flung back.

"Mr. Tinker!" called the housekeeper gently.

Tinker did not stir.

"Why, what ever's the matter with him?" murmured Mrs. Bardell, a sudden feeling of alarm coming to her. "Getting on for nine o'clock, and neither of them astir! Mr. Tinker—Mr. Tinker!"

She raised her voice almost loud. Ordinarily, Tinker would have awakened on the spot, for he had trained himself to sleep lightly. Mrs. Bardell very seldom found it necessary to call either Blake or Tinker, and when she did so, they awakened at the first sound of her voice.

But this time Tinker lay like a log. "Dearie me!" muttered the old lady. "It don't seem right to me!"

She advanced into the bed-room, and seized Tinker by the shoulder, and gave him a good shake. Tinker rolled about limply, but showed no sign whatever of awakening. He was breathing quietly and regularly, but he was dead asleep.

"Wake up, Mr. Tinker!" shouted Mrs. Bardell, in alarm. "My gracious me! Why doesn't the young gentleman wake up? Are you trying to play a trick with me, Mr. Tinker? Come, come—wake up!"

But Tinker did not wake up, and all Mrs. Bardell's efforts were useless. Thoroughly scared, she hurried along to Sexton Blake's room, and hammered loudly upon the door. She received no response—and a cautious glance within the room showed her Sexton Blake lying in bed in exactly the same unconscious condition as Tinker!

"Oh dear—oh dear!" wailed Mrs. Bardell. "Something dreadful has happened! I never felt so flustered in all my life!"

She called in a high voice, filled with anxiety, to Sexton Blake. But the detective did not stir.

And then the housekeeper made another surprising discovery. She happened to go into the best spare bed-room. She couldn't remember afterwards why she went in. But there, in the bed, she beheld a stranger with a bronzed face and a big moustache. She had not known that Mr. Henry Kennedy was in the house. And this stranger, too, was incapable of being awakened!

Mrs. Bardell had never descended the stairs so quickly in all her life as she descended them on this occasion. She almost fell down, and ran into the arms of a maidservant at





the bottom. The girl almost dropped a tray full of crockery.

"Why, mum, you give me a rare start!" she exclaimed.

"I don't know what to do, Maud—I'm all in a flutter!" panted Mrs. Bardell. "There's Mr. Blake and Mr. Tinker, and another gentleman upstairs, and I can't wake them up! I can't get them to answer at all!"

"Oh, I expect they're sleeping heavy, mum—"

"Don't be absurd, girl!" snapped Mrs. Bardell. "Mr. Blake and Mr. Tinker always wake up immediate. I don't know what to do—I can't understand it! I've got a horrid feeling that something is dreadfully wrong!"

"P'raps they'll wake up soon, mum!" said the maidservant hopefully. "If I was you, I shouldn't get so worried about it—"

But Mrs. Bardell wouldn't listen to the girl, and she hurried upstairs, and had another attempt to awake the sleeping ones. But this attempt met with complete failure. By this time Mrs. Bardell was nearly in hysterics. She had even tried cold water on Tinker, but with no effect.

Then, in desperation, she sent off the girl to Sexton Blake's doctor. The medical man lived only a short distance away, and he was soon round, looking anxious and concerned, for Mrs. Bardell's hastily-written note had been full of fears.

"Oh, Dr. Davenport, what ever can it mean?" she asked shakily. "I'm sure the poor gentlemen are dying—"

"Come, Mrs. Bardell, you must pull yourself together!" interrupted the doctor. "I will soon have a look at Mr. Blake, and tell you what's wrong. You can't wake them up, I understand?"

"That I can't, doctor!"

Dr. Davenport quickly went upstairs, and he was soon in Sexton Blake's bed-room. Mrs. Bardell hovered just inside the door, and two maidservants hung about outside. And the doctor submitted Blake to a careful examination.

When he looked round his expression was grave.

"Oh, is—is the poor gentleman in danger?" asked the housekeeper anxiously.

"There is no need for you to be alarmed, Mrs. Bardell," said the doctor. "Mr. Blake is in no danger whatever, but I have every reason to suspect that he has received an injection of some drug which has produced this trance-like sleep. Mr. Blake will probably remain in this position for two or three days."

"Oh, my sakes alive!" gasped the housekeeper faintly. "But—but he'll die in that time, without eating or drinking—"

"Nonsense!" laughed the doctor. "The fast will do him good, rather than harm, and there is no need for you to get talking about this, Mrs. Bardell. Mr. Blake will wake up in due course, but not before three days have passed."

"And—and mustn't I do anything?"

"Nothing at all," said the medical man. "Simply leave Mr. Blake in bed, and he will awaken and get up when the time arrives. I can assure you there is no danger whatever. The trance may be shorter than I have said, but I don't fancy so."

The doctor turned round, and examined a tiny puncture which he had noticed at the back of Sexton Blake's neck. It was very red, and slightly puffed up. And this was obviously the place where the injection had been made.

That unknown intruder, in the early hours of the morning, must have crept into the three bed-rooms, one after another, and performed this simple little operation.

Rupert Waldo, without a doubt, was the perpetrator. He had rendered Blake and Tinker harmless for three days! And Mr. Kennedy had been treated in the same way. By the time they awakened, probably Waldo would have cleared out. The master crook had decided to be merciful, after all. He had evidently discovered that Blake and Tinker had escaped electrocution, and although he could have taken their lives on this second occasion, he had not done so.

The doctor examined Tinker and Mr. Kennedy, and found that tiny puncture on the neck of each. They were in precisely the same condition as Sexton Blake. The doctor, having reassured Mrs. Bardell again, took his departure. There was nothing he could do to awaken the patients.

Mrs. Bardell was still in a flutter, and decidedly uneasy. But as the hours of the morning wore on she grew more comfortable. For she looked in at Tinker several times,

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and found him breathing evenly and healthily every time. But it worried Mrs. Bardell tremendously to think that she had no means to get ready. Her occupation was gone, and she could hardly settle to anything.

She was somewhat relieved by the doctor's promise to call again in the evening to see that the patients were going on all right. And she obeyed the warning which the medical man had given her—she did not breathe a word of what had happened to a soul, and she warned the maids to keep their mouths shut. If they so much as breathed a sound they would be dismissed on the spot.

And so the hours passed until, in the afternoon, Mrs. Bardell went out on a shopping expedition. The house was quiet and still, the maids being at the back, and busy with their own work.

The upper part of the house was absolutely deserted, except for those three quietly breathing forms in the different bed-rooms. And then, after another short period of time had elapsed, Sexton Blake's door quietly opened.

The famous detective calmly walked out into the passage!

He passed quietly to Tinker's bed-room, and opened the door. Tinker was lying in bed, motionless.

"It's all right, young 'un!" said Blake softly. "Wake up!"

Amazingly enough, Tinker bobbed up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Well, thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "I was wondering how much longer this giddy game would last, guv'nor! I never thought it would be so frightfully irksome to lie in bed!"

"Don't talk too loudly, and slip into your clothing," said Blake. "When you've done come to me in the laboratory."

Ten minutes later Blake and Tinker were in the laboratory, attired in their usual garments, and both of them looking in the pink of condition. Dr. Davenport's diagnosis had scarcely been correct. But there was something strange about this whole affair.

There was a slightly amused expression in Sexton Blake's eyes, but a somewhat grim one, too. It was an expression which Tinker well knew. It meant that his master had determined upon a certain course, and was only waiting for the moment when he would spring his attack on the enemy.

Tinker looked bewildered.

"I give it up, sir," he said bluntly. "I've been trying all the morning to think what it all means, and I'm just as mystified as ever."

"It won't take me long to clear away some of your problems, at least," said Sexton Blake calmly. "It was highly necessary to adopt this course, Tinker, as you will understand later. My object is to turn the tables upon the worthy Mr. Waldo. He believes that he has put us out of action. And we are going to show him that his little attention has been of the greatest benefit to us. For while he thinks we are incapable of taking any steps, we shall take quite a few!"

"Yes, that's ripping, sir!" said Tinker. "Did you notice those two cards on the consulting-room table?"

"I did," replied Blake. "Mr. Saville and Mr. Bray have called, I can see; but we expected that. The good Mrs. Bardell has doubtless put them off with some plausible story, but I shall make a point of seeing that pair of energetic young men as soon as the time is ripe."

"I'm puzzled about what happened in the night, sir—"

"My dear, good Tinker, there is no reason why you should be puzzled," interrupted Blake, as he lit a cigarette. "Our unbidden visitor, who stole in during the early hours of the morning, was probably friend Rupert himself. I can't swear to that, of course, but I hardly think that Waldo would leave such a delicate matter in other hands. We are dealing with a clever gentleman, Tinker."

"Rather, sir!"

"Moreover, Waldo came here for the added purpose of getting back into his possession the mummified head," went on Sexton Blake. "At all events, it has disappeared. Waldo didn't like that out of his own keeping, for it was evidence. He thinks we shall be placed hors-de-combat for at least three days, and during that time he will certainly use every effort to bring off a big coup, and then vanish. That's just where we come in, young 'un. We shall put a stopper on his pretty scheme."

"Good!" said Tinker heartily. "But even now I can't make out why we're still conscious—"

"And yet I explained it to you before dawn, soon after the drugging took place," interrupted Sexton Blake. "No doubt you were half asleep at the time, and I sometimes think that is your usual condition, young man!"

"Hang it all, guv'nor—"

"We haven't got time to argue now!" chuckled Blake. "You see, Tinker, I wasn't asleep when Waldo burglariously entered my bed-room. I had, as a matter of fact, been expecting something of the sort."

"You'd been expecting it!"

"Certainly!"

"But why—"

"My dear fellow, Waldo must have discovered that we had escaped, and he would have wits enough to know that we had come straight home!" exclaimed the detective. "He probably believed that we had brought Mr. Kennedy with us, too. And so Rupert came along with amiable intentions. In spite of his electrocution scheme, I was convinced that he would not attempt to really harm us, and so I allowed him to puncture my neck with his tiny syringe. He passed out of my room quickly, and a second later I was out of bed, applying tests."

"That was pretty smart of you, guv'nor!"

"Not at all," said Blake. "I had to be certain as quickly as possible, in case Mr. Waldo had injected poison. I soon discovered the actual drug, which is quite harmless, but places the victim in a trance-like sleep which continues for three or four days, according to the strength of the dose. This drug is well known to me, and it was merely the matter of a few minutes to make a second injection, nullifying the effects. It is very useful to have a knowledge of drugs and their antidotes, Tinker."

"I should think it is, guv'nor," agreed Tinker.

"Of course, you were sleeping like a log, as usual," went on Sexton Blake. "Waldo administered the drug in your case, and you were quite oblivious to the fact. No doubt it was the same with Mr. Kennedy. Anyway, it was not so very long before I came into your bed-room, woke you up, and treated you with a second injection. I also warned you, as you will remember, to remain fast asleep, even when you were called by Mrs. Bardell, and visited by the doctor."

"It's queer the doctor didn't rumble, sir?" said Tinker thoughtfully. "Surely he ought to have known that we were both shamming."

"He did!" grinned Blake. "Surely, Tinker, you do not think that I should leave an important matter of that sort to chance? I rang up the doctor just before six, and had quite an interesting conversation with him. You see, I explained a few details, and gave him to understand that we were to be dead asleep, with no possibility of being awakened until three days had elapsed. Thus Dr. Davenport was fully prepared when he came this morning."

Tinker's eyes glistened with admiration.

"By jingo, you're a cute one, guv'nor!" he said, taking a deep breath. "It's wonderful the way you worked this thing! Why, Waldo hasn't got any idea of the real state of affairs, and while he's kidding himself that we're harmless, we shall be getting on his track!"

"Precisely!" smiled Blake. "That is my idea."

"And what about Mr. Kennedy?" asked Tinker. "Of course, you dosed him with the antidote—"

"I did not!"

"Eh?"

"I left Mr. Kennedy alone," said Blake calmly. "As I said before, Waldo's drug is quite harmless, and our client will be far safer where he is. No harm can come to him in this house, particularly as we are all supposed to be helpless."

Tinker nodded.

"Yes, that's a good idea," he said. "We can leave Mr. Kennedy here, and get off on the track. He'll be as safe as eggs, and out of harm's way. And what's the programme now, sir?"

"Well, to begin with, I require a good square meal," said Sexton Blake. "I don't think it would be wise for us to let Mrs. Bardell or anybody of the household know that we are up and about. So we must sneak out like daylight robbers, and obtain our food elsewhere."

"A member of this clan might be on the watch, sir," said Tinker.

"I fancy not," replied Blake. "In any case we will chance it. Fortunately, Mrs. Bardell is out at the moment, and so wa





have an opportunity. Get into your overcoat and hat, and we will be off."

"And what's the programme to-night, sir?"

Sexton Blake looked grim.

"To-night, Tinker, we have one task to perform," he said calmly. "We are going to capture Mr. Rupert Waldo!"

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

"You are now in the Sacred Council Chamber."

SIR HOWARD BARNSTABLE, Bart., the richest man on the membership list of the Marlton Club, stood on the steps of that select institution in a decidedly unsteady state.

It could hardly be said that Sir Howard was intoxicated, but he was precious near to that condition. He had dined well, and he had partaken liberally of the most expensive port the club could boast of.

Sir Howard was fond of port, but it was seldom that he took too much. On this particular occasion he was fully aware of the fact that he had overstepped the mark, and he was feeling rather foolish.

Still in possession of his right wits, he was nevertheless fuddled and somewhat hazy in his bearings, and he was grateful for the arm of a companion, upon which he leant heavily.

The baronet was a big man, jovial and good-natured. By all repute he was a millionaire, and he had always been exceedingly liberal with his money. He was trying to smoke a cigar, but somehow it wouldn't behave itself.

"It's no good, old man: I can't smoke to-night!" he mumbled, throwing the cigar away. "Where's a taxi? We must have a taxi: I was an infernal fool not to have my car sent round. You'll come home with me?"

"Certainly, Sir Howard!" said his companion genially. "I doubt if you could get home without some assistance, anyway. It's rather a lucky thing that Lady Barnstable is out of town just now. You'd be in for a wiggling, otherwise!"

Sir Howard breathed with relief.

"By George, yes!" he said thickly. "Where's that confounded taxi?"

A cab soon came as Sir Howard's companion waved, and the pair got into it. The millionaire baronet's London address was in Mayfair, but he was too far gone to notice that the taxi took the direction of Oxford Street, and then turned into Baker Street. And when it finally pulled up in Trevor Avenue, outside a big block of flats, he was under the impression that he had arrived home.

"Here we are, Sir Howard!" said his companion. "Can you manage all right?"

Sir Howard stepped out upon the pavement, and clung to the other for support. Then he looked about him rather bewildered.

"What's this?" he demanded. "We've come somewhere else—"

"Of course we have!" chuckled the other. "My dear Sir Howard, you surely didn't think I should take you home in this condition? I've brought you to my chambers, and within an hour you'll be quite yourself again."

"Good idea, old man—deucedly good!" said Sir Howard dully.

He went with his companion into the main entrance without any objection, and they mounted the stairs until they arrived upon the third floor. Outside the door of No. 19 they paused, and the other man inserted a key in the lock. A minute later they had both disappeared into the flat.

The landing remained quiet. It was very dim, with one softly-shaded electric light gleaming from a wall bracket. This was not a high block of flats, and there were no further apartments on the fourth floor—merely store-rooms, and so forth. And the top landing was in total darkness.

Tinker sat on the top stair, eager and impatient. And Sexton Blake, who had been gazing into the tiny mirror of a folding periscope, joined his young companion almost at once.

"Well, guv'nor?" asked Tinker softly.

"The light, unfortunately, is not particularly brilliant," said Sexton Blake. "In one way, perhaps, that is to our advantage, since there was no fear of my periscope being seen. I didn't run the risk of putting my head over the balustrade, in any case."

"But what did you see, sir?"

"I saw a well-dressed man escort no less a person than Sir Howard Barnstable into the flat," replied Sexton Blake grimly. "And Sir Howard, as you know, Tinker, is one of the richest men in London. As I suspected,

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Waldo is not letting the grass grow under his feet."

"Phew!" whistled Tinker. "He means to rook Sir Howard of a tidy sum, I expect. Was the other man Waldo himself?"

"He was—alias Dr. Hulton Brenner," replied Blake. "This is quite a neat little scheme, Tinker, and Waldo has now very obligingly supplied us with all the evidence we need. I might have sprung sooner, but I could not have done so without the positive proof. But now we shall capture our tricky friend red-handed."

"And a good many members of the Clan, too, sir," said Tinker.

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Every one!" he replied grimly. "Every single member of the Clan of the Seven Heads will be roped in to-night, Tinker. This is going to be one big swoop, and Waldo, as the Chief, will regret the day that he started this project."

Tinker stared.

"But how can you rope them all in, sir?" he asked. "There are thousands of members, and they are scattered—"

"From to-night the Clan of the Seven Heads will cease to exist," interrupted Sexton Blake curtly. "There are some things you do not know, Tinker. I have made my plans completely—in every detail."

"And what do we do now—at the moment?" asked Tinker.

"We wait—until Lennard and his men arrive!" said Sexton Blake. "They ought to be here within five minutes, and then the responsibility will be out of our hands. We have done all the work, Tinker, and the police will reap the benefit."

"That's just like you, guv'nor!" grumbled Tinker. "You're always giving Scotland Yard tons of help, and you never get any credit for it."

Blake chuckled.

"But I have the pleasure of conducting interesting inquiries such as this," he replied placidly. "That is all the reward I need, Tinker. My tussles with Waldo are always interesting, and this one particularly so, for he seems to have gathered tremendous strength about him."

And while Sexton Blake and Tinker waited outside, a very curious little scene was taking place within the flat. Sir Howard Barnstable found himself conducted into a comfortable sitting-room, where he was supplied with a neat soda-water—which, although distasteful to him, he swallowed without demur.

Then, in his semi-intoxicated condition, he dropped off—only to be awakened within a moment or two by a hand shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes, blinked foolishly, and then started.

"By George! What—what—" He gasped for breath, staring.

And he had good reason to stare, for he found himself confronted by something which did not resemble anything in this world—a cloaked figure with a cone-shaped head-gear, and with slits for eyes. The robe was covered with grotesque heads, and the figure stood motionless.

"Sir, Howard Barnstable, you are in the presence of the Clan of the Seven Heads!" said the figure solemnly. "It is a privilege which few have enjoyed, and you shall now be taken into the Council Chamber itself!"

Sir Howard staggered to his feet.

"What—what foolery is this?" he mumbled thickly. "Good heavens! I must be dreaming—"

"No, Sir Howard, you are perfectly awake!" interrupted the figure. "I am the High Chief of the Clan, and if you are eligible for admittance, I shall be happy to pronounce you a member of the Clan. Come!"

The High Chief moved out of the apartment, gently assisting Sir Howard at the same time. They went into the passage, and thence into the Council Chamber. It was filled with a bluish-green light, and was an apartment of many wonders.

The door closed softly, and Sir Howard Barnstable looked round him with his watery eyes, trying to grasp everything through his befuddled brain. He saw things which horrified him.

In the centre of the room stood a pedestal, and upon it the head of a mummy—but it seemed worse to Sir Howard in his present condition. There were other heads on brackets round the walls, and the panelling was ornamented by horrible, grotesque faces.

And all round stood other robed figures like that of the High Chief, only their attire was not quite so elaborate. There were eight of them, standing round the walls as motionless as statues. And their eyes could be seen gleaming behind the narrow slits.

"You are now in the sacred Council Chamber," said the High Chief. "You are in the presence of the High Chief of the Clan and his eight Grand Advisors. You are at liberty, Sir Howard, to become a member of this most Ancient Order."

Sir Howard pulled himself together.

"Oh, so that's the idea?" he said uncertainly. "Jolly good, too! Deucedly good, in fact. Kind of Freemasons, or Druids, or something of that kind? Splendid! Quite an adventure, by George!"

Sir Howard had accepted the bait—just as Waldo had foreseen. He did not imagine that this mummery was connected with a secret society, but regarded the whole thing as a





harmless affair. He took it to mean that he was in a lodge of some Masonic-like body. And, in his present condition, he was willing enough to join.

If he had not been willing, then Waldo had methods to make him so.

"You are right, Sir Howard," said the High Chief. "The opportunity has come when you can take advantage of this offer, and you will be made a member of the Clan if you so wish it. We, for our part, will be most gratified to have such a distinguished member as yourself."

"Certainly—certainly!" said Sir Howard. "Nothing will suit me better. I suppose there'll be a kind of entrance fee, or something like that. I'm game, of course—game for anything, by George!"

"The entrance fee is a small matter—merely a question of ten pounds," said the High Chief. "But members are always at liberty to contribute to the funds of the Clan. You may please yourself in that direction, Sir Howard."

"Excellent!" said the baronet, pulling out his pocket-book. "This kind of thing attracts me, you know—I like something out of the ordinary. Makes a bit of a change, by George! Here's fifty—that'll do for a start, eh?"

The money was taken by the High Chief, and after that a kind of ceremony was gone through. The High Chief chanted, and the council chamber was filled with weird noises. Then Sir Howard was seated before a desk, and he willingly signed a long printed document, which he didn't trouble to read, and which proclaimed him a member of the Clan.

Waldo's plan had succeeded.

He had the signature, and that was really all that mattered. Sir Howard would now be allowed to go, and when he was sober he would probably remember it all, and chuckle with enjoyment. He would imagine that he had joined a perfectly harmless society.

Then would come the note ordering him to attend a Clan meeting. Not knowing the address—for he would certainly not remember Trevor Mansions—he would not obey the order.

He would then receive a visit from a member of the Clan—probably Waldo himself. He would be told in blunt language

what the Clan really was—a criminal society—and he would be staggered by the news.

If he showed any signs of jibbing or betraying the thing to the police, he would be reminded that his own signature had been placed to an incriminating document. If those documents were obtained by the police, Sir Howard himself would stand exposed as a leader of the criminal society.

There was little doubt that he would pay up handsomely to have the whole matter hushed up. Twenty-five or fifty thousand would be nothing to him, and he would rather pay it than suffer the scandal. And so Waldo would walk off with his booty, and he would be perfectly safe. It was, without a doubt, a very ingenious scheme, for he could work the same "stunt" again and again.

A few more picturesque ceremonies were gone through, and then Sir Howard Barnstable was led out of the Council Chamber, with its eight silent Grand Advisors, and its seven mummified heads.

Sir Howard was feeling merry now, and he had quite enjoyed the experience. A few minutes later he was joined by the friend who had brought him here, who proceeded to give the baronet a whisky and soda.

It was only a small one, but, for some reason, Sir Howard became quite fuddled again, and he was decidedly unsteady as he was led towards the exit. There was certainly no fear of his remembering the block of flats or the locality. This was a most important point, for Waldo did not want his victims to give any information away after they had been rooked.

Sexton Blake and Tinker, on the upper landing, were waiting, and Sexton Blake himself was filled with impatience and anger. He glanced at his watch repeatedly, and he glared at Tinker.

"They ought to have been here ten minutes ago!" he muttered. "What on earth has kept them? My whole plan might be spoilt by this, Tinker. Lennard faithfully promised me he would be here with half a dozen men and—"

"Hold on, sir!" interrupted Tinker quickly. "I can hear something!"

Blake whipped out his revolver, and stole down the stairs. He did not need to look. He knew well enough what the sounds meant. Sir Howard Barnstable was being steered out of the flat. And it was most

important that Rupert Waldo should be caught red-handed in the company of his intended victim.

And still the police had not arrived. Blake ran down the stairs, with Tinker at his heels. And they were just in time to face Sir Howard Barnstable and his companion as they came out through the tiny entrance lobby of the flat.

"Hands up, Waldo!" rapped out Blake curtly. "I know you're contemptuous of most weapons, but if you make any attempt to escape, I shall fire—and I shall shatter your left thigh-bone!"

Waldo stood perfectly still, and then laughed.

"You win, Blake!" he said calmly. "How, in the name of Heaven, you've managed it, I don't know! I thought I was cleverer than you—and you've shown me up as a conceited idiot! The game's yours!"

Tinker was clutching at the wall for support.

"But—but you've made a mistake, guv'nor!" he gasped faintly.

"How so?" asked Blake, without shifting his gaze from Waldo.

"This—this isn't Waldo—it's Mr. Kennedy!" shouted Tinker. "He's our client, guv'nor, and—and—"

"And Mr. Kennedy is also Dr. Hulton Brenner, and also Mr. Rupert Waldo!" said Sexton Blake urbanely. "My dear Tinker, I must confess that I have deceived you slightly, but I thought it the better way. The excellent Mr. Henry R. Kennedy, of Sunrise Cottage, Hampstead, is none other than Waldo himself!"

Tinker battled for breath.

"Great Scott!" he panted. "I—I can't take it all in, sir!"

Waldo smiled.

"Well, Blake, there is no need for us to talk out here," he said. "I dare say you'd like a chat, eh? Why not come and sit down inside? No doubt you are expecting the police?"

"I am," replied Blake curtly.

"Then we might as well have things comfortable," said Waldo.

"Don't go in, guv'nor!" put in Tinker quickly. "It's some other trap—"

"On my word of honour, Blake, I will attempt no tricks upon you," said Waldo quietly. "I give you my word that I will make no attempt to escape before the police



## THE MARSH FARM MYSTERY!

A good detective story and a good mystery story are almost interchangeable terms. Seldom, however, is the excitement of detective investigation and the lure of a first-class mystery so skilfully blended as in the yarn which is the main item on next week's bill of fare. It shows Sexton Blake to his best advantage—which is saying something—and altogether is one of the best that have been published this year, from all points of view. In short, the author has achieved a really meritorious piece of work, and any readers who miss next week's number will have cause to regret their bad luck. Regular readers will not risk it, of course. They will already have ordered in advance.

## THE TOPICAL BUDGET!

**RUSSIA.**—Your Editor is particularly gratified to be able to announce two forthcoming events that will be of more than usual interest, for the reason that they both deal with topical events of the day. The first is a splendid long, complete story of Sexton Blake and Tinker in the famine-stricken areas of Russia. It is a fine theme, and the author has risen to his opportunity and given us a tale that will rank as one of the best of its kind ever published. Look out for it. The title is: "**In the Midst of Famine!**"

**INDIA.**—The stirring events that are now taking place in Southern India, where the rising of the fanatical Moplahs is being countered by the activities of British troops, are the background for a forthcoming Sexton Blake yarn that will do you good to read. The title, "**Besieged in Malabar!**" can only hint at the wealth of incident the yarn contains, and both Sexton Blake and Tinker are not only in the midst of things, but acquit themselves in a manner that will delight their most exacting admirers.

**THE CONFEDERATION.**—Another Confederation story is on the way, written with all the author's old power of gripping his readers from start to finish. "**Diamond Mad; or, The Man Who Hired the Confederation**" is a yarn you will remember for months after you have read it. More details later.

—\*—

Do **YOUR** friends know of all these good things?





arrive. The game is up, and I might as well take it calmly."

"That is your solemn word, Waldo?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

The famous detective stowed his revolver away at once, and Rupert Waldo bowed.

"I thank you for accepting my word!" he said quietly. "You will never have cause to distrust me, Blake. Please, come in!"

Tinker was not feeling very comfortable, but Blake was. He had studied Waldo's character many times, and although the Wonder-Man was a master crook, he, nevertheless, had honour. If he gave his word, that word was his bond.

They all entered the flat, and Sir Howard Barnstable was dropped into an easy-chair, and he forthwith went off into a heavy sleep. Waldo removed his disguise with extraordinary rapidity. He pulled a prepared cloth from one of his pockets, swiftly wiped his face, and the disguise vanished, revealing him as himself.

"Sir Howard will be all right," he said calmly. "I've merely dosed him with a little harmless stuff taken with a whisky. And now, Blake, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me when you jumped to the truth?"

"When you first came to my rooms in Baker Street."

"What! You knew then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Waldo ruefully. "I knew you'd spotted me through Dr. Hulton Brenner, but I had an idea that I should best you with the Kennedy disguise. I fooled myself into believing that I had deceived you."

"No, you only deceived Tinker," smiled Sexton Blake.

"You—you rotter!" said Tinker indignantly. "I should think you did deceive me! I thought you were a genuine client! But—but I can't understand it all! And what do you mean by trying to electrocute us, you scoundrel?"

Rupert Waldo grinned.

"My dear young innocent, you don't seem to appreciate the position," he replied. "I am glad of this opportunity to explain a few things, for I shouldn't like you to have any hard ideas about me."

"You had better look sharp," said Sexton Blake. "The police will soon be here. Of course, Waldo, I knew all along that this was a one-man show, and I must really compliment you upon the astonishingly ingenious way in which you have worked things."

"One man!" repeated Tinker blankly. "But—but what about the Clan?"

Blake waved his hand.

"You now see the Clan before you," he replied. "Waldo represents the entire membership, my dear Tinker. This has been a most curious case—nothing more or less than a battle of wits between Waldo and myself. There has not even been a client."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Tinker scratching his head. "I can't realise it, you know! Dr. Hulton Brenner, and then Mr. Kennedy! And it was Waldo all the time. But why on earth should Waldo want to come to us as a client and take us off to Hampstead? I'm frightfully mixed! And how did Waldo get to Baker Street before us?"

"These little points can be easily cleared up," said Waldo. "When you called upon me last night, Blake, I knew that I had been recognised. I fear you more than the whole of Scotland Yard put together, and I knew that my only chance of succeeding in this present plan was to deal with you first."

"That is what I judged," said Blake.

"Well, I lost no time in discarding Dr. Brenner, and becoming Mr. Kennedy," said Waldo. "I performed this very rapidly, got my car out, and drove straight up to your door. I hardly thought I should arrive before you, but the fact that I did made it all the better. I was under the impression that my highly imaginative story went right home."

"It didn't," smiled Blake. "It is an amusing game, Waldo. I have been quite interested to see how you made your moves."

"But, guv'nor, if you knew who he was all the time, why didn't you capture him, instead of going to all that trouble?" asked Tinker.

"On the face of it, that seems a most reasonable question," said Blake. "But, Tinker, I wanted to obtain the real evidence of Waldo's guilt, and now I've got it. I merely let him run on—I bided my time."

"Yes, confound you!" said Waldo gruffly. "And you've won the game, too, Blake. I was only just ready to start when you butted in, and I've been preparing and paving the way for this business for weeks and months. You must admit that it's rough on me."

"I admit nothing of the kind," said Blake. "You are working against the law, Waldo, and as long as you do that you will be in danger of exposure. I can well imagine that this scheme has taken you months to perfect."

"For many weeks I have been living a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde existence," went on Waldo. "I have spent much of my time in the smart set in the character of Mr. Kennedy—becoming acquainted with rich people. I am well known in Hampstead as a boisterous old boy with a somewhat gay temperament. And in Trevor Mansions I've established a character in Dr. Hulton Brenner—a quiet scientist who lives quite alone. And in one blow you have wrecked it all!"

"But why did you take us to Hampstead?" demanded Tinker.

"Because my one object was to fool you," replied Waldo. "Once in the bungalow, I went into the kitchen, screamed, pushed the table over, locked the door, and slipped through the window. My Clan garments were there ready. It was the work of a minute to remove my disguise, slip into the gown, and enter by the front door at your rear. Of course, I was there alone, although I tried to make you believe that there were many others."

"Well, this beats everything!" said Tinker. "You went into the kitchen as Mr. Kennedy, and then came and collared us as yourself!"

"Precisely!" agreed Waldo. "Quick work, wasn't it? I think I should do rather well on the music-halls as a quick-change artist—eh? I doped you, and tied you to that fence. Of course, those wires were not connected to any control-box, as I explained to you. That was merely a little joke of mine."

## Football Competition No. 3.

Matches played Saturday September 24th.

### £300 WON.

In this competition six competitors each sent in a coupon correctly forecasting the results of all the matches on the coupon. The Prize of £300 has therefore been divided among them as follows:

Mr. H. Haslam, 66, Healey Wood Road, Burnley.  
Mr. J. Worsfold, East End, Fairford, Glos.  
Mr. A. Priddey, 31, Nottingham Road, Ilkeston.  
Mr. R. Sumner, 59, Adrian Street, Moston, Manchester.  
Mr. J. E. Taylor, 84, Grenville Street, Stockport.  
Mr. C. Cornwall, Down Oaks Cottage, Westfield, Sussex.

"So I imagine," said Sexton Blake drily. "But when you came back as the wounded Mr. Kennedy, I kept up the deceit. You see, Waldo, we were both playing the same game. You were fooling me, and I was fooling you."

"That's just it!" said Waldo ruefully. "Your part was all right, but mine was the opposite—I wasn't fooling you at all!"

"But what about those wounds?" asked Tinker.

"My dear boy, I inflicted them myself!" said Waldo lightly. "I couldn't feel them, so what did it matter? My idea was to get back to Baker Street with you, and then settle you for three or four days. That was my whole object from the very start. I couldn't do it at the beginning, because you would never have fallen for the trick. Of course, when we got to Baker Street, I simply slipped out and injected that drug, and I made a little puncture in my own neck to correspond with yours. Then, this afternoon, I slipped away, and imagined that I had left you two sleeping peacefully in your beds. I was a fool not to make sure. How on earth did you wake up, Blake?"

Blake soon explained what he had done, and Waldo grunted.

"You've beaten me at every turn!" he growled. "But one of these days, Blake, I'll beat you; before long I'll prove that I'm your master! I sha'n't harm you—I respect you too highly for that—but in a straight battle of wits, I'll gain the upper hand. Give me time, and I'll do it!"

"You had plenty of chances this time, Waldo," said Blake. "But I let you run on, knowing that you would give yourself away in the end. You have done. And your story

of the Clan of the Seven Heads was never quite convincing."

"I tried to make it so!" exclaimed Waldo gruffly. "But it was a one-man show, Blake, and I was not fully prepared. The seven heads, as you may guess, are mummy heads. I picked them up from an old curio dealer in Paris, and it was these heads, in fact, which first gave me the idea. Inside my little council chamber I have a number of robed figures, and they look quite convincing with their gleaming eyes behind the slits—but these eyes, I may add, are glass ones."

"Yes, but look here," put in Tinker. "What about that broken window-pane? How did you manage to replace it so quickly?"

Waldo smiled.

"That was quite simple," he replied easily. "The bed-room window is fitted with panes of the same size, and it was a very short task to take one out and refit it in the other room. You may remember that I didn't allow you to go very close—or you might have seen that it was only hastily fixed."

"And the room itself?" asked Blake. "Bray and Saville told me that it was a weird apartment—"

"Quite right, too; it's in the same condition now, if you care to look at it," interrupted Waldo. "You see, Blake, I planned everything carefully, and that room contains a few of my own little patents. The platform in the middle of the room, for example, lifts up in one movement and becomes a dining-table. All the panels are reversible, and there are many other similar quick-change effects. I spent quite a lot of time in making my plans."

"You certainly made every preparation," said Sexton Blake. "I dare say you would have succeeded, but for the accident of that one head being flung into the street. It is unexpected details of that kind which wreck the most elaborate plans."

"And I couldn't be prepared for it, either," said the Wonder-Man. "Well, I fancy your friends are coming—I can hear footsteps on the stairs."

Neither Blake nor Tinker had heard them, but a thunderous knock upon the door came a moment later. Waldo's hearing was amazingly acute. Tinker opened the door, and ushered in Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard of Scotland Yard, several other Yard detectives, and a small, mean-looking man in uniform.

"Enter, officers of the law!" said Waldo mockingly. "And, as usual, they are late!" "Not my fault!" grunted Lennard, with a glance at Blake. "We came by Tube, and there was a confounded hold-up in the tunnel. I've never been so furious in all my life! I'm glad to find everything's all right, Blake."

Before Sexton Blake could say anything, the mean-looking man in the uniform stepped forward, his face alight with eagerness and self-importance.

"I knowed he was a wrong 'un!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "My name's Williams, sir, and I'm the porter here. I was allus suspicious about Dr. Brenner, and when he was out last night I thought I'd have a look round!"

Rupert Waldo glared.

"Oh, so you were the interfering rat who burgled my premises?" he snapped.

"Burgled!" repeated the porter indignantly. "I was aidin' the law! I crep' up the lift-shaft, and looked round the flat to see how things was."

"This may be a serious matter for you, my man!" interrupted Chief-Inspector Lennard curtly. "We don't require your sort to aid the law, and you've practically admitted that you acted as a housebreaker—and the best thing you can do is to get the whole thing off your chest at once."

"That's what I am doing!" said the porter, in an aggrieved voice. "I done my best to help the police, ain't I? I went in that front room with a little electric torch—I daren't switch on the lights in front. Then I saw that 'orrible head starin' at me!"

"I hope it spoilt your supper!" said Waldo grimly.

"I was fair shook up," replied the porter. "My heye! I 'ardly knew what I was doin' for the minute. I grabbed hold of the thing and flung it across the room, I was that scared. It must have gone through the winder, because I heard a crash of glass. Then I bunked, and went out of the flat by the front door."

"And I suppose you went straight home?" asked Blake.

(Continued on page 24.)

U.J.—No. 942.





## THE WORST HOUSE AT ST WALSTANS.

(Continued from page 2.)

utmost he could ever again extend to him. Directly that term of grace was up, supplies would, he said, be stopped.

Knowing old Wadlow to be a man of his word, Mr. Flackton had always taken care to settle his bill promptly. That weekly bill would now be three or four times the usual total, and Mr. Flackton, as he slowly returned to the school, found himself wondering how on earth he was going to find the money wherewith to settle it.

Well, it would have to be done somehow. Perhaps those West African mining shares he had recently acquired might come off trumps! He had great hopes of those shares. They might suddenly "boom" on 'Change, and in that event he could sell out at a handsome profit. Meanwhile, he would have to temporarily discontinue further speculation. All the money he could get hold of would be wanted for Wadlow.

And in a month's time that insolent brute Chopkins would be dunning him again!

### A Surprise for Snell's House!

**T**HERE were no complaints at dinner-time next day. Not only was the food of first-rate quality; but, thanks to a visit paid by Mrs. Flackton to the kitchens, the cooking had been satisfactorily carried out.

So Tony Smith and everybody else cleared their plates with gusto, and devoutly hoped that the improved condition of things would last.

When, at the end of the meal, Mr. Flackton rose from his seat and left the dining-hall, a mob of boys surrounded Tony and insisted on shaking hands with him.

In vain did Tony try to escape their attentions. Much to his astonishment, he found that he had suddenly become the most popular fellow in the house. His sensational cricket debut had already gained him considerable esteem, but the satisfactory outcome of his protests against the bad food brought him still more into favour.

Had Tony's form-fellows been equal to the burden, they would most probably have hoisted him shoulder-high and borne him in triumph round the hall. Having regard to his size and weight, however, they prudently forbore to attempt it, and contented themselves with shaking his hand and slapping him on the back.

"Don't be a lot of silly idiots!" exclaimed Tony, as he tried to shake off the mob.

"Idiots, he blowed!" rejoined Fatty Boyle. "We'd be a pretty set of rotters if we didn't return thanks, wouldn't we, you chaps?"

"Rather!" agreed half a dozen others.

"You've just about saved my life, Smith," went on Boyle, with ludicrous gravity. "What I've suffered at this school nobody knows except myself! Bad grub has been steadily but surely killing me! Yes, you fellows may grin, but it's the truth! For a long time I've been gradually fading away and—"

"Oh, shut up, you corpulent gorgon!" broke in Tony. "Fading away! Why, you look like a prize porker!"

Fatty Boyle looked hurt.

"If you build up much more you'll go off bust one of these days!" laughed Tony, and hurried away to escape further embarrassing attentions.

A few days passed, and the improvement in the quality of the food was maintained. It really looked as though the reform had come to stay.

On Wednesday afternoon not one boy of the Fourth and lower Forms in Flackton's absented himself from the cricket-field. All turned up in the hope of seeing Tony Smith do great things in the match against Snell's House.

Nor were they disappointed!

Going in first, Snell's were dismissed for the paltry total of 35. Tony captured seven wickets—including that of Trenton, the

school captain—and had only 11 runs scored off his bowling.

Then, as usual, Wade and Denyer opened the innings for Flackton's House. They played with such extreme caution that in half an hour they had amassed only 18 runs between them.

At that total Denyer was caught at the wicket, and Tony Smith came in.

And then the fun began!

It was almost a repetition of what had happened in the scratch game a few days previously. For Tony at once began to pulverise the bowling. Off the first over sent down to him he scored 14—three 4's and a 2.

Wade smiled grimly, and continued his cautious tactics. Ordinarily, Wade was anything but a stonewaller. To-day, however, he stonewalled shamelessly. At only the very loosest balls did he lash out; at everything else he played forward or back with the one object of keeping his wicket intact.

For the present, his game must be a purely defensive one. He must just keep his end up, so that Smith might have a cautious tactics. Ordinarily, Wade was well knew the danger of a collapse. Once he and Collins were disposed of, the chance of anyone remaining in with Smith was remote. The woefully long "tail" of the side was not at all likely to "wag."

So Wade resisted all temptation to take risks, and was well rewarded for his unselfishness. For the young giant at the other end continued to punish the bowling so unmercifully that the trundlers became absolutely demoralised, and began to send down so many bad balls that Wade was able to score on his own account without imperilling his wicket.

Soon the hundred went up, and after that boundary succeeded boundary with such frequency that the excited crowd of onlookers grew hoarse with yelling.

Then 150 was reached, of which no less than 103 stood to Tony's credit. So confidently were both batsmen playing, that it looked as if the second century would be reached without the long partnership being severed.

But when the total was only six short of that number, Wade got his leg in front of a straight-pitched ball, and retired for a well-played 37.

Collins, the house-captain, now emerged from the pavilion. He had pads on, and carried a bat in his hand; but before going to the wicket he took Tony on one side.

"Are you keen on making any more, Smith?" he asked.

"Not a bit!" answered Tony, who knew what was in the captain's mind. "I'd much rather we tried to lick 'em by an innings. Is there time to do it?"

"We've just a few minutes under the hour. I leave it to you, Smith. Shall I declare or not?"

"Oh, rather! We may be able to get 'em all out."

"Thanks awfully!" said Collins, and, turning to the rival captain, he announced that the innings was closed.

Trenton grinned and nodded, then made for the pavilion with his men.

Flackton's House had, of course, already won the match on the first innings; but, as has been previously remarked, the glory of inflicting an innings' defeat on a rival House was infinitely greater than a win on the first innings' aggregate only.

So, with the score at 194 for two (Tony Smith not out 137) Collins had "declared" in the hope that Snell's might be got out a second time in the hour, which still remained for play.

Needless to say, it was on Tony he was chiefly relying to bring about that happy result. Tony had taken seven wickets for 11 in the first innings. If he could only repeat the dose, an innings' victory might be achieved.

But could he do it? Collins and Wade were far from confident that he could; for it really seemed too much to expect that the youngster, big and strong though he was, could bowl at his best immediately after a strenuous batting bout. However, as there was nothing to lose and everything to gain, the attempt was well worth making.

No time was wasted. Snell's House were as eager to go in again as Flackton's were to start getting them out. For although the match was lost, Snell's were anxious to prove that they were capable of better things than the poor show they had put up in the first innings. That Flackton's, the wooden-spoon holders, could get them out again in something under sixty minutes they deemed impossible. Trenton, their captain, derided the idea. It was, he considered, like Collins' cheek to close the innings in order to attempt such a hopeless job. Snell's would jolly soon prove that their wretched first innings was just one of those unaccountably feeble displays of which even the very finest teams are occasionally guilty.

So Trenton made himself comfortable on one of the pavilion seats, while his two opening batsmen—Keith and Jackman—strode out to the wicket with the determined air of men who intended to play out time together, and incidentally improve their batting averages in doing it.

But the pair didn't play out time together. They didn't even stay with one another for an over! For with his very first ball, Tony Smith uprooted Keith's off-stump!

The next man in—Jordan—managed to at once break his duck with a lucky snick for a single. This gave Jackman an opportunity to sample Tony's bowling.

And Jackman evidently did not like the first sample sent along to him. He made a feeble attempt to play the ball, only to see it swerve in from the off and miss his wicket by a fraction of an inch.

The next ball swerved from the leg-side. Once again Jackman's bat missed it—and off flew the balls!

Two wickets down for one run!

In came Trenton, captain of Snell's, and captain also of the School Eleven. He shaped in his usual confident style, and returned the two remaining deliveries of the over to Tony.

Denyer now took the ball, and off his opening over Jordan and Trenton between them scored 11 runs. This left Jordan to face Tony. Once again he snicked him—this time for a couple. Then he cut him for four. And then—well, then, Jordan, in attempting to repeat that last successful stroke, cut only empty air. The ball eluded his bat, shot in, and disturbed his middle-stump.

To describe in detail the remainder of that innings would only be to weary the reader. It was just a "procession." Snell's could do nothing with Tony Smith. The youngster was simply unplayable. Once again he clean bowled Trenton, and but for the usually safe Wade miffing a catch in the slips, he would have brought off the "hat trick."

But happily that mistake did not affect the issue. For, with a quarter of an hour to spare, Flackton's dismissed Snell's for 31 runs—which was 4 less than they had made in their first innings!

Tony Smith had more than "repeated the dose." He had actually gone one better by bagging eight wickets for 10!

That was, indeed, a great day for Flackton's House! After going almost through the season without winning a match, they could at first hardly realise that they had vanquished Snell's in such overwhelming fashion.

But the thing had really happened. It was no dream, but hard, solid fact. Flackton's the despised—Flackton's, the holders of the wooden spoon—had triumphed at last!

And that evening Tony Smith got his school cap. It was handed to him by Trenton, the captain of the team for whose crushing defeat the youngster had been so largely responsible.

"I want you to turn out for the school on Saturday, Smith," said Trenton. "We're playing Danehurst College, you know. It's the return game—the last school match of the season. Danehurst licked us badly a month ago, and I'm particularly keen on turning the tables on 'em. I fancy we're safe to do it now!"

Coming as it did from the great Trenton, this was a high compliment indeed to be paid to a mere Fourth-Former. It took Tony completely by surprise.

Before he could find words with which to thank Trenton, the latter had turned and hurried away.

(Another fine instalment next Thursday!)





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## IN THE GRIP OF WALDO!

(Continued from page 21.)

"That I did, sir," declared Williams. "I was that upset, I hardly cared what happened. But I discovered this bloke's secret, didn't I?"

"I am glad this little point is cleared up," said the detective. "Just because this inquisitive porter chose to pry into your affairs, Waldo, this whole disaster to your plan has occurred. I can now understand why there was no porter on duty when we came, and it dismisses the idea of a genuine burglar—which I never really accepted. No hardened housebreaker would fly into a panic at the sight of a mummy's head."

"Well, hardly," said Lennard. "You'll have to come along to the station with us, Williams—but you needn't look frightened. You've had no trouble, Blake? And I suppose you've got your case pretty complete?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"There's your prisoner, Lennard," he said. "I can supply all the evidence you need—although I fancy Waldo is wanted on several

old charges. Fortunately, the Tube hold up has not caused any trouble."

Waldo rose to his feet.

"I gave you my word, Blake, that I wouldn't attempt to escape until the police arrived," he said smoothly. "The police have arrived, and I don't feel inclined to remain. Gentlemen, I wish you good-evening!"

"Look out!" yelled Tinker abruptly.

Waldo acted like lightning. As a piece of rapid-fire work it was the most amazing thing that had ever been seen. Before Blake could draw his revolver, before Lennard could move a step forward, Waldo whipped up the heavy chair he had been sitting on, and tossed it across the room as though it were made of cane.

It thudded against two of the Yard detectives, hurting them considerably. They went down, and Waldo, at the same second, charged forward. Blake wrenched at him, and Lennard seized him by the neck.

Waldo threw them off without difficulty. Lennard found himself gripped as he had never been gripped before, and was flung back as though a battering-ram had struck him. He simply whirled into Blake's arms, sending the detective flying, and Tinker was mixed-up in the general melee.

Waldo streaked down the passage, reached the front door, and did not pause to open it. Blake and Lennard and the others were hard on his heels. With all his tremendous

strength, Waldo charged at the door. It buckled and splintered up like match-boarding, and the master crook arrived on the tiled landing, scratched, torn, and desperate.

He gave one leap, and disappeared into the well of the staircase.

Half-way down, his hands came into contact with the opposite balustrade. He seized it, gripped, slithered down a few feet, and then released his hold. Crash! He landed upon the floor of the entrance-hall in a heap.

And when the detectives rushed down the stairs, the only signs of Rupert Waldo were two or three spots of blood upon the tiled floor. The Wonder-Man had vanished, and although the Yard men scoured the neighbourhood, no trace of him was found.

"An interesting case, Tinker," said Sexton Blake, as he lolled back in his easy-chair in the consulting-room in Baker Street. "It provided us with quite a number of thrills, and I think we may claim to have beaten Waldo all along the line."

"Right enough, sir!" agreed Tinker. "We didn't even lose him at the end—the police did that. Our responsibility had ended as soon as the Yard men stepped in. By Jingo, Waldo's an extraordinary man, sir!"

Sexton Blake nodded thoughtfully.

"You are correct there, Tinker," he replied.

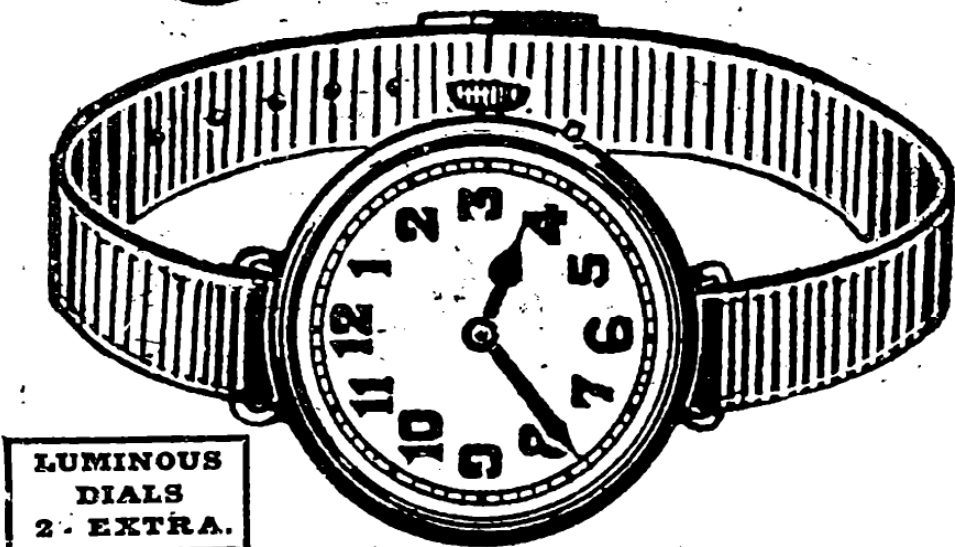
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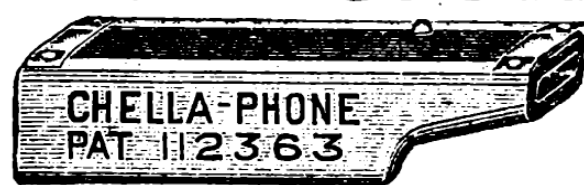
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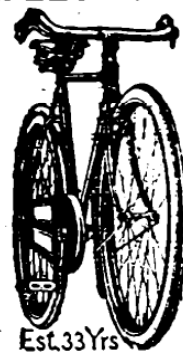
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