

The Battered Bookworm

A Case for Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective

by Marthinus Conradie

v1.1 - 3/5/25

SUMMARY

This case is set in 1888

- **Author:** Marthinus Conradie <ConradieMS@ufs.ac.za>
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Instructions

To play this case you will need the SHCD Directories, Map of London, and List of allies.
You will also need to use the Paragraph Lookup Table on the next page.

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THE BATTERED BOOKWORM

Introduction

Tuesday, July 10th, 1888

We find Sherlock Holmes inside 221B Baker Street, attired in a purple dressing gown, languidly smoking his pipe, while reclining in a plush red armchair. Inspector Lestrade is pacing up and down, twiddling his bowler hat and looking rather ruffled, while Dr Watson urges him to calm down.

“Wiggins and company!” Holmes exclaims, “You have an opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of my tutelage. Lestrade! The particulars again!”

Inspector Lestrade breathes deeply and speaks like a chess player bereft of his queen. “We have a crisis at The Yard. One of our informers has been murdered in his place of business. His name was Denny Boland, proprietor of Dobell Books. I nearly arrested him some years ago for forging and selling Shakespearean letters, but I was advised against carrying the case to court.” He looks meaningfully at Mr Holmes, who emits a long column of smoke.

“And why was Mr Boland considered useful, Inspector?” Wiggins inquires on our behalf.

Holmes interjects, “Mr Boland was well connected to the London underground. Inducing him to inform for Scotland Yard rendered his network permeable to police observation.”

“Quite so,” Lestrade resumes, “So you can understand my extreme discomfort at his loss. His body was discovered this morning at 6 o’clock by his assistant, John Cloyd.”

Holmes interrupts again, “Wiggins and his confederates are quite capable of expediting this case. Inspector, share the effects of the late Mr Boland with them.”

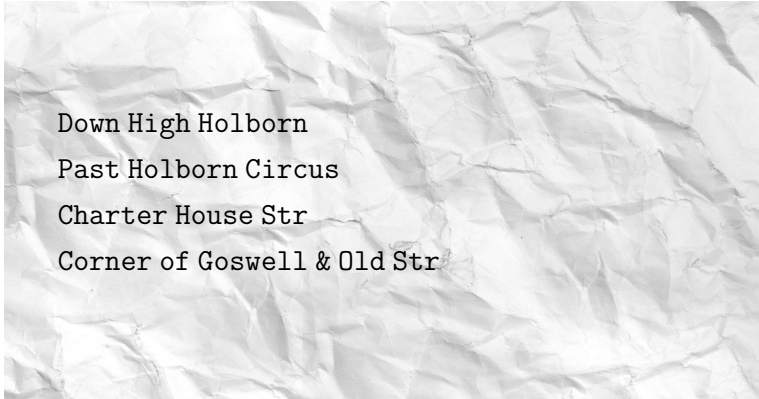
Lestrade obliges and we receive a crumpled receipt from Wolff, Philips & Co along with a page from The Times for July 4th. Then, with great care, Lestrade adds a final item,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

“This burned piece of paper was discovered in Mr Boland’s hearth. The rest were on his person.”

“Off you go Wiggins!” Holmes declares with a wide sweep of his pipe-wielding hand, indicating the broad vista of London beyond the window of 221B Baker Street.

Crumpled receipt



Down High Holborn
Past Holborn Circus
Charter House Str
Corner of Goswell & Old Str



Burned note

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NEWSPAPERS

PERSONALS, & C.

TO THE PERSONS who sing with great gusto and commendable consistency every Sunday and Wednesday evenings outside the Beaufort Boarding House, please pursue an alternative hobby. — AD.

ADVERTISING

LUKER TEXTILES invite investors to participate in exciting prospects for expansion of silk industries into South America. Immense profits promised. For more consult at 61 Sloane Street, SW.

POOLE & CO offer a unique selection of fashionable canes, watches, hats and suits for the discerning gentleman. Finsbury Square, 10 EC.

RIGBY & CO - Finest firearms for hunting, sporting and protection. 1 St James Street, SW.



BIRTHS

ON THE 2ND inst., at Holdwyne Cottage, Wandsworth, the wife of James M. Pym, of a daughter.

ON THE 2RD inst., at Shelby Hall, Harrington-road Lester, the wife of Major R.S. Willmott, 13th Hussars, of a daughter.

DEATHS

ON THE 28th of June, Mr Thomas Mallory Sullivan, co-founder of Blake & Sullivan Textiles, of a stroke in his home.

ON THE 3rd of July, Tobias Wentworth, of inflammation of the lungs, husband to Marjorie Clementine Wentworth, Pendleton Road, Bristol.

SITUATIONS

REQUIRED — A man-servant who has been page under a butler, to work in the family of a prominent London bank manager. Superb references a must; experience with large house preferred. Apply at 5 Warren Street NW.

TRAGIC ACCIDENT ON THE HIGH SEAS

THE PRIDE OF NORFOLK a transatlantic voyaging craft, docked in New York yesterday with the tragic report that one passenger was lost to the sea during the voyage.

Mr Malcolm Ploughman who, according to several sailors, had become inebriated, refused to remain below decks during a particularly violent storm last night. He was lost overboard and presumably drowned.

FURORE AT POPULAR RARE BOOKS DEALER

A SCENE of unaccustomed tumult erupted yesterday at the popular Dobell Books, owned by Mr Denny Boland.

A gentleman, who shall remain unnamed, confronted and treated, in a beastly fashion, a lady of high standing. Foul language was uttered loud enough to be heard all along the street outside the premises.

Mr Boland, evincing his characteristic decorum, swiftly restored harmony and, at his behest, we refrain from identifying the persons involved in this fracas.

"Men of his avuncular disposition are lamentably rare," one onlooker opined.

BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENT

BLAKE & SULLIVAN TEXTILES — Speaking from their offices in 29 Brook Street, NW, Mr Ned Blake announced yesterday that lucrative trade arrangements have been finalised with major silk farms in India and the Chinese interior.

After months of laborious negotiations, the celebrated business acumen of Ned Blake appears to have yielded fruit. The names of his business associates in India and China have not yet been disclosed, fuelling tense speculation across the textiles industry.

Mr Blake recently took sole leadership of the business, following the unfortunate death of his senior partner, and he is making quite a name for himself.



POETRY CONTEST

THE LONDON LITERARY SOCIETY is pleased to announce its half-annual poetry contest will commence this week. Inquire at Pickering & Chatto Rare Books, 86 SW.

LABOUR

POSTAL WORKERS in the South Western and East Central districts of London have threatened to disrupt the delivery of mail if their demands for improved working conditions are not met within the next month.

SPORT

LONDON'S SHOOTING SOCIETY announces its annual contest, starting next week Friday, 8AM at 46 Marylebone Road, NW.



“MONEY NO OBJECT!”

VULCAN. “THIS’LL RUN INTO MONEY MA-AM!”

BRITANNIA. “NEVER MIND ABOUT *THAT* AS LONG AS I CONTINUE TO RULE THE WAVES!!”



The London Gazette.

No. 32,338

TUESDAY, JULY 10, 1888

Price 3d.

PERSONALS, & c.

OWNER of dog has found that I need to conduct further training; otherwise, papers will be withheld for the duration. Traveling to places excluding Italy, Frank and India, which cannot occur. People enjoy incognito phrases. Total cost: £7.8 / £14.18 / £21.22 £28.34 HL.

7, 8, 14, 18, 21, 22, 28, 34.

PERSONALS, & c

MATERIALS are not available, can only be acquired and made ready for project later. Underway, over-way. Cannot help. Never. Total expenditure £1.8/ £13.15
SB.

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LEADS

STOP!



WARNING! Do **not** read through the rest of this document like a book from beginning to end. Lead entries are meant to be read individually only when you look up a lead by its number.

Close this book now and follow rulebook instructions for looking up leads.

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EC

10 EC

“Gentleman!” the proprietor of Poole & Co exclaims, “I cannot say that I understand what right you have to inquire after the business of other people, especially whether a wife bought a birthday gift for her husband from us. Please leave!” With that, he stalks away.

Before we depart, a junior clerk sidles up to us and whispers, “You lot work with Mr Holmes, don’t you? Well, if this helps him, I can tell you that Mrs Blake bought a handsome cane with a silver top for her husband.”



30 EC

In his office at The Times, Henry Ellis scrutinises the edition for the 4th of July, found upon Mr Denny Boland's person.

"This piece on the kafuffle at Dobell Books is Langdale Pike's writing, no doubt. This report on the textiles industry is certainly the work of our business correspondents. Would you like to see them?"

We decline his offer and excuse ourselves, somewhat confused as to why we thought Henry might be able to aid our efforts in this case.



38 EC

“Mr Boland,” Sir Jasper Meeks pronounces, “was killed during the early hours of this morning at his bookstore, I would say between three and five. He was struck on the front of his head by a heavy, blunt instrument, probably round with a slight ridge towards the top, and about the size of a man’s fist. I suspect that the object in question was metallic, although stout wood might also suffice for such a wound. The initial injury would have caused serious damage; however, it was unlikely to kill the man outright. Instead, he died upon striking the bookshelf behind him. The blow to his forehead impacted with such force, that the back of his head struck the bookshelf behind the counter. Perchance, his cranium hit a jagged corner with sufficient force to break the man’s neck.”



52 EC

“Hullo, hullo, hullo – and what can I be doin’ for you chaps on this lovely, lovely day?” Porky Shinwell is evidently in high spirits when we call at the Raven & Rat. “Been a good few days’ o’ business is all I can say. Now, you lot’d be wantin information on sumfing for Mr Holmes, no doubt. Order a pint and I’d be happy to assist - assumin’ I can, of course.”

“All right. Let’s have a round. Know anything about Mr Boland?” Wiggins asks.

Porky knots his brows, sticks out his chin and scratches his stubble. “He’s that nice fella’ who ran the bookstore, ain’t he? Got killed early this morning? Right old angel most people thought he was – and he was friendly, sure enough. But there was another side to ‘im. What I can tell you is that his bookstore was a drop-off.”

“You might have to elaborate a little there, mate,” Wiggins presses.

Porky glances around and continues in a low voice, “Supposing you want to send information to a... friend, but you want to do so without nobody spotting the two of you together. Well, you put a slip of paper containing your message inside a book, which you sell to Old Mr Boland – only you don’t sell it, as such. No, you pay him. Then, you let him know who’s to pick up the book and when. Later on, your friend comes by to get the book from Mr Boland. Again, a gratuity is exchanged. Nice and clean as a parlour maid’s nails.”

“Wait, what’s to stop Mr Boland from reading the note and selling the information to other interested parties?”

“Don’t know. I suppose folks would write their notes in code, won’t they? But that’s the thing about Old Mr Boland. He had a reputation for honesty that way. Wouldn’t blackmail or trick nobody, at least so it was said.”

“Do you have any idea why Mr Boland would have a page of The Times for July 4th on his person?”

Porky’s glittering eyes run over the page. “Ah! I know these two gents.” He pokes at the advertisement for Luker Textiles and the report on Blake and Sullivan’s. “Ned Blake popped round asking if I knew someone who could follow Horace Luker about town without being spotted. Then he, that’s Ned, also asks for someone who could follow his own wife about. Can you imagine that? What’s the world coming to? It’s enough to break your heart, isn’t it?”

“It most certainly is. Did you help Mr Blake find someone suitably skilled?”

“Me? Would I deal in such black business as that?” Porky winks at us.

“You also met Horace Luker?”

“He was only in here once. That was a month ago. Meeting with a fella called Malcolm Ploughman, he was.”

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“Who is he?”

Porky shrugs and starts cleaning his counter. “A customer. I don’t know much about him, honestly. He’s in and out of London. When he is in town, he stays at the Staple Inn on account of him being chummy with the owner.”

“Any idea what Mr Ploughman does for a living?”

“The owner of the Staple let it be known that Ploughman can find things out. Precisely what that means, I don’t know. Honestly.”

“One last question. Have you ever heard of the Sam-Brett gang?”

An unmistakeable shadow of fear darkens Porky’s eyes. “Nothing more than rumour. Heard something about them specialising in forgeries – passports, official papers and the like, but nothing definite. You might want to speak to Pickle Jack, but do it discreet like, right. I don’t have his address. He don’t have an address as such. See if you can find him at the Red Boar.”



72 EC

Ms. Jennifer Olmstead is happy to confirm that she was, in fact, the young woman involved in the fracas with Horace Luker in Dobell Books.

“Except, it was I who confronted him, not the other way around. My friend, Langdale Pike, kept my name out of the papers, but I wish he had printed Horace Luker’s. That man is a reptile of the most odious kind.”

“Do you mind telling us what topic the argument concerned?”

“Not at all. It concerned Ned Blake’s wife, Juliana. I confronted Luker with the accusation that he is having an affair with Mrs Blake. It is true, you know.”

“Did he confirm your suspicions?”

“Not as such, no. But then he wouldn’t, would he? Instead, he launched into a diatribe that no woman in polite society should ever be subjected to – which is as much confirmation as anyone needs. It was actually delightful to witness his face redden as he shouted. But, I am sure of it. Horace Luker and Mrs Blake are having an affair. Poor Ned – Ned Blake, that is. I did tell him, you know. Told him months ago. He has not spoken to me since.”

“Did Mr Boland ever visit you?”

Our interviewee frowns in open surprise. “No, why would he? He was a kind soul and gentle to his very marrow, but the two of us were not so acquainted that he ever called.”



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NW

16 NW

The home of Mr Denny Boland is considerably less organised than his bookstore. We find more evidence of his love of smoking. Unfortunately, our search fails to uncover new points of interest.



18 NW

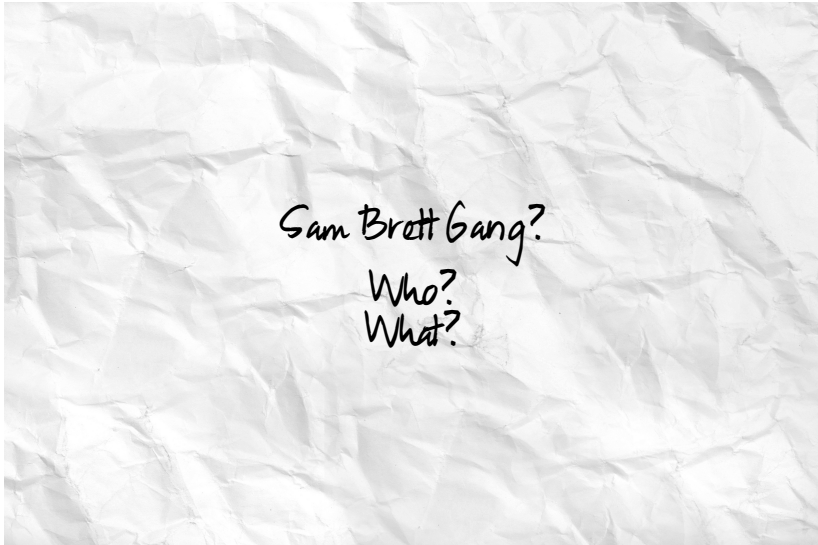
At the Parsons & Son toy shop, the proprietor insists on showing us a cheap cardboard Jack-in-the-box. We purchase the toy for what certainly strikes us as the exorbitant price of one shilling. Upon closer inspection, we find a note with the words: Inspector L – red feather - Spaniard's – prices key.



25 NW

John Cloyd occupies a small, but neat apartment. He speaks in a high, little voice, "Can't tell you much more than I told the constables already. A more fair-minded employer no one could have asked for. I showed up for work right on time... and there he was. Dead behind the counter. Head smashed in." James covers his face in his palms and pales. "If you will excuse me a moment."

While he is away, we conduct ourselves upon a surreptitious search of his small living room and discover a small, crumpled slip of paper.



At that very moment, our host reappears.

"Mr Cloyd, we appreciate that you are enduring great personal distress, but if you could share everything you remember, then it might help us secure justice for Mr Boland."

"All I can really add is... well, it seems like nothing, but..."

"Yes?"

"Well, there was a man waiting by the store when I showed up. It's not unusual for one or two customers to show up early. But this one, well, he was peering in through the window and, when he heard me coming, he dashed off like a shot."

"Did you recognise him?"

"Yes, actually. I'd seen him around rather often over the last few weeks. Mr Luker, I think his name was. I didn't say anything about it to the constables because, well it slipped my mind at the time, and afterwards I just supposed he'd seen some blood on

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

the shelves or the floor, or something and ran. The sight of blood can do that to a sensitive constitution.”

“One last question, Mr Cloyd. Were there any other regular customers who seemed to have a close relationship with Mr Boland?”

“Oh yes. Mrs Juliana Blake was one.” At the mention of her name, his face brightens. “Always friendly she was. She often sold a book or two back to Mr Boland. Then, a few days later, she’d stop by, buy a new book, and so forth. It seemed like a cycle of sorts. Mr Boland liked her very much. In fact, not two days ago, he remarked that he was worried about her. Never explained why.”



29 NW

When we are finally admitted to Ned Blake's office at Blake and Sullivan's Textile Company, we enter a small yet tastefully appointed room. The desk is ordered to military standards. Mr Ned Blake is a tall man, positively vibrating with energy. His moustache is precisely groomed and the lines of his suit disclose impeccable taste. We estimate his age as somewhere in his mid-thirties, judging by his dark hair, slightly receding hairline, greying temples and startlingly green eyes. His disposition towards us is peremptory.

"Yes, yes? What do you think I can do for you? I am rather a busy man as you can imagine."

"Mr Blake, you might have heard about the death of Mr Boland?"

"My time is precious – far too precious to process every scrap of news beyond that which directly concerns my business. I work in a thoroughly cutthroat industry, don't you know." It was not a question.

"Then, we shall be direct. Did you know Mr Boland?"

"Know him? No. I might have bought a book there, once or twice, as a gift for my young cousins or some such. Do you know every person you buy a hat or a cup of tea from? If that is all?"

"Mr Blake can you account for your whereabouts this morning between three and six o'clock?"

"I see no reason to answer that question. Am I a suspect now, in the death of a man I hardly knew? Preposterous. If that is all." It was not a question and the man exits his office with long strides, hands gripped together behind his back.

"Mr Blake!" we hear his personal secretary calling after him. "Will you be wanting your..." but he falls silent upon realising that Mr Blake was already beyond earshot. The secretary enters the office to address us. He is a wiry young man with red hair and a basso voice, "You must forgive his manner. There has been some concern over espionage from our rivals. People want to know how he's been stacking up those deals in India and China, and with whom. If you catch wind of anything ratty during your inquiries into Mr Boland's death, I would appreciate you sharing the information with me. You are welcome to visit me at my home, at 63 SW. Renfield's the name. Forrest Renfield. I would certainly relish a chance to bag the blighter who's been selling information." He falls silent for a second and pinches his nose, "If, in fact, the spy exists at all, of course."

We manage to leave without making firm promises.



SE

14 SE

After affirming that her mistress is willing to receive us, we are ushered into a handsomely appointed parlour. Mrs Juliana Blake greets us with genteel affability and a disarming smile. Her eyes are a deep brown, matching the dark curls of her artfully arranged hair. She calls for tea and we are treated to a dainty selection of cakes. Upon our mention of Mr Boland's death, her lovely features turn sombre.

"An awful tragedy," she comments, eyes averted. "He was a gentle man. I frequented his shop almost weekly. I am rather a fast reader, you see."

"Can you tell us why anyone might want to harm Mr Boland?"

"I cannot guess. As I have already said, he was a friendly and kind-hearted sort. He comported himself as though he were everyone's grandfather."

"Do you know much about your husband's business dealings?"

"What an about-face in topic, young man. Why would I know anything about his business? My husband prides himself on his independence and entrepreneurial accomplishments."

"Are you acquainted with Mr Horace Luker?"

Her lips press together. "He is a vile man, if you will forgive me for saying so - a reptile and unscrupulous profit-seeker." She glances at the great grandfather clock behind us, "Oh goodness, you must forgive me. I have a pressing appointment to attend - so sorry. My maid will show you out." Mrs Blake departs before we can inquire after her whereabouts, or that of her husband's, during the early hours of the morning when the murder was likely committed.

As we exit the front door, the maid looks over her shoulder before whispering at us, "Pardon the Mrs. She's not herself and who can blame her, what with her husband working days on end without rest? He even has an office at home and he barely leaves it these days - when he's home at all, that is."

"Can you tell us where your employers were around 4am this morning?"

"Mr Blake, he came home around 5 o'clock. Mere minutes later, the two of them had an awful row - something about him losing a gift."

"What gift?"

"Oh, I think I've said enough. I must go now. Mind you, if this gets into the papers, I'll deny it all."



33 SE

Freddie, along with his tattered top hat, is ready and waiting for us at the Bar of Gold. When he responds to our 'donation' by urging us to visit his friend at a different public house, we realise that we are being strung along on a merry old goose chase.



34 SE

"I dunno who's been bleating in ya ears," Pickle Jack exclaims at the Red Boar, "but I dunno nuffin about no gangs!" With that, the foul-smelling and crooked old man stalks off.

We are ready to depart when a street urchin sidles up to us. "Oi," he whispers. "Got some news for ya." He held out his cupped hand. "For a consideration." Wiggins dumps a few pennies into his hand and the boy seems disappointed, but shrugs and says, "Try my mate Freddie up at the Bar o' Gold. He's the one with the old top hat."



44 SE

An old man with a seamed face and a disconcertingly wet cough looks over the receipt for Wolff, Philips & Co.

“Yes,” he croaks like the decking of ancient ship. “This is one of ours. Says so on the slip. What’s it to you?”

“Are you familiar with Mr Denny Boland, sir?”

“Mr Boland comes in here regular.” He shrugs. “He’s a loyal customer, he is. Why are you asking?”

“He was found murdered this morning. Could you hazard a guess as to who might wish him harm?”

“Bless my soul, but I didn’t know. A loss to be sure. Good man he was. Always had a joke ready. But I can’t say as I know my customers well enough to guess at why anyone would visit violence upon them.”



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SW

2 SW

“Of course, I know who quarrelled in Dobell Books. He is Horace Luker and she is Jennifer Olmstead. Consider her one of my accomplices. Jenny is a gifted gossip-monger – a veritable encyclopaedia on London’s upper crust.” Landale Pike’s lips peel back from his teeth. “Where Horace Luker is concerned, Jenny has a personal stake. You see, he’s a business rival of Ned Blake, for whom poor Jenny has fallen head over heels. Ned, however, is already married.”

“In that case, she cannot like his wife very much, can she?”

Langdale snorts, “Not at all. She is another interesting duck, that wife of Ned. Quite a charming woman, but rather taken with gambling. Yes! I know! There are only a few, very select and rather nefarious establishments around London, which permit women to play at cards or roll dice. Juliana Blake was in quite deep until recently. What is that quaint American expression? Up to the hips in alligators. My sources whisper that Horace Luker recently covered all her debts. Now, why do you imagine he’d shell out notes for her? Poor old husband, hey? I wonder if the great Businessman Blake knows about his darling wife’s recreational habits.”



8 SW

“Unable to help you with this one, I’m afraid,” Mycroft Holmes responds at the Diogenes Cub. “The case is rather left of my expertise. Frankly, I’m astonished to see you here.”



13 SW

Seated in his office behind a desperately cluttered desk, Inspector Lestrade appears no less disconsolate than this earlier morning. “No, I have nothing to add. If Denny Boland had any intelligence regarding the Sam-Brett gang, then he never got round to sharing it with me –which means this bloody gang remains as bloody unknown as the bloody dark side of the moon. He certainly never mentioned any death threats to me.”

Suddenly, a junior constable bursts into the office, shouting, “Inspector! Inspector!” as if Lestrade were indeed on the moon.

“Don’t shout man!”

“Apologies sir,” the constable whispers in a barely audible hiss. He proffers a slip of paper to his superior. “This just arrived for you – marked as urgent, it is.”

With a grumble like a hungry tiger, Lestrade snatches the note and, as he reads it, his teeth show in a predatory grin. “Well, well, well. Wiggins, you and your mates are in luck. This just in: I might have a lead on the Sam-Brett gang after all. Get to Spaniard’s Inn. Look for a beggar with a red feather in his hat and make sure that you slip the phrase God Save the Queen into the conversation.”

“Right away. Who is this man, Inspector?”

Lestrade’s grin widens. “We keep some of our secrets, Wiggins.”



22 SW

We locate the eminent criminologist H.R. Murray asleep on his desk.

“What, what?” he awakes as Wiggins gently clears his throat. “Is that you Wembly? Ah, I suppose you are after information about the death at Dobby Books. That is the name, right? No, don’t tell me, Dobell. That’s it. Well, since I have no murder weapon to examine or any other curious substances, there is no more I can disclose on the matter. Why exactly are you here?”

None of us can venture an answer.



25 SW

“Pennies for an old soldier! Pity and pennies for an old soldier! Served my Queen and country well, I did!” yells a bedraggled figure, perched atop a heap of dirty rags outside the door to the Spaniard’s. We spot a tiny, rather wet-looking red feather stuck to his tatty bowler.

“Here you are sir,” Wiggins imparts a little charity. “Compliments of Inspector Lestrade and... God save the Queen,” he whispers.

The beggar blinks at us in confusion. “No idea what it is you’re wanting gents. Just an old soldier, I am, and thank you for taking pity on me.” But his right hand flashes in in a lightning-quick motion, throwing a tiny matchbox at Wiggins.

A few blocks away, we huddle together to examine the grimy box. Inside we find two newspaper clippings.

[See the PDF titled London Gazette Clippings]



48 SW

Upon learning that we are acting as consultants for Scotland Yard, the owner of Gordini's is delighted to speak us. "Pillars of the law, yes? That's you. I help," he declares in a lilting Italian accent.

We inquire as to whether he is acquainted with any of our persons of interest.

"Senor Luker. I know him. Good man. Good customer. Early riser. He often has the breakfast here."

"When last did you see Mr – that is, Senor Luker?"

"Yesterday morning. Just before five o'clock. I remember cause he was my first customer. Often he is first. Always eats alone. I no think that is healthy. Eating must be shared with friends and family. But it is his way. Customer never wrong, yes?"



61 SW

At the offices of Mr Horace Luker, we are informed that he has not been seen today, but that he might be found at Goldini's restaurant.



63 SW

At Forrest Renfield's apartment, we ask whether he can account for Mr Blake's movements last night or early this morning.

"Oh, he was still in his office when I left at eight last night. I had some paperwork to complete this morning and thus I showed up early, probably around three, and Mr Blake was just leaving his office. He must have been there all night."

"Can you tell us anything more about his fears of espionage? What manner of information has been leaked and to whom?"

"Mr Blake has been quite tight lipped about it. As it happens, I asked him about it this very morning as he was leaving his office. But he sort of, slashed his cane through the air to indicate that he would not speak on the subject... Wait a minute. Didn't you come here to share more information with me?"



65 SW

At Mr Luker's resplendent London home, his servants report that he left London early this morning for an undisclosed destination.



WC

14 WC

“Regrettably, I can only affirm that Mr Boland had once been the subject of an investigation into fraudulent letters by literary luminaries of the Elizabethan era, and that he was never charged. Nothing new, chaps.”

We show him the burned piece of paper. “Any idea what this might refer to?”

“Hmmm. The Sam-Brett gang? Unfortunately, I know nothing about them apart from rumours that they offer specialised services of some kind. Not your run-of-the-mill robbers from what I hear. More than that, however, I cannot say with any certainty. Perhaps you should resort to whatever sources you might have cultivated among London’s criminal underground.”



35 WC

At the Staple Inn, we walk to the counter and converse amiably with the barman for a little while. Eventually, we deem the moment right and ask whether a certain Mr Malcolm Ploughman is available. The barman subjects us to a suspicious glare hot enough to fry eggs. He reaches under the counter for an item we cannot see, but the purpose of which seems obvious.

“If it’s a job you’re wanting to offer him, you’re too late. He couldn’t get one last time he was here and now he’s gone off. He’s left Blighty and I ain’t telling you where he went. If you have a job, come back in another month. Actually, don’t come back at all. I don’t like the shape of your faces or the questions coming out of your gobs.”

We follow his advice, but notice an old woman cleaning the floors by the door. Just before making our exit we ask whether she might have any gossip on Mr Ploughman in exchange for a few pennies.

“Oh, you want nothing to do with that evil man,” is all she says.



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The crime scene looks precisely as Inspector Lestrade described it. The body has been removed and nothing new can be gleaned.



FINAL QUESTIONS

Questions

1. Who murdered Mr Denny Boland?
2. How was Mr Boland murdered?
3. Why was Mr Boland murdered?
4. Were Mrs Juliana Blake and Mr Horace Luker having an affair?
5. Who was conducting corporate espionage on Blake and Sullivan Textiles, and why?
6. Why did Mr Boland have the newspaper for July 4th on his person?
7. What service was the Sam-Brett gang performing for whom?



Solution

1. Ned Blake. The murder was committed around 4 AM. Ned Blake left his office at 3 AM, giving him enough time to walk to Mr Boland's store (as confirmed by his secretary and by consulting the map of London). The nature of the murder suggests an impulsive act of violence rather than premeditated design. Blake's forceful personality certainly matches such a *modus operandi*. Horace Luker scarpered simply because he saw Denny Boland's blood and feared that he might be implicated. His actions indicate rashness, but not guilt.
2. Mr Boland was murdered with Blake's cane. Sir Jasper Meeks' description of the wound that drove Mr Boland's head into the bookcase behind the counter, suggests that the murder weapon might have been a cane. Mr Ned Blake's cane is missing (see the exchange between Mr Blake and his secretary at the former's office, as well as the secretary's confirmation that Ned Blake had his cane on the morning of July 10; for further evidence, see Poole & Co for confirmation that Mrs Blake had bought a cane for her husband, which is now missing).
3. Ned Blake confronted Mr Boland early on the morning of July 10 to ask whether his wife, Juliana Blake and Horace Luker were using his store to communicate. He might have learned that his wife frequented the store because he had her followed, or because he had paid someone to follow Horace Luker. When Mr Boland refused to disclose any information, Ned Blake struck him in a fit of rage.
4. No.
5. Mrs Blake was passing information about her husband's business to Horace Luker via Dobell Books. Horace Luker was blackmailing her by threatening to reveal her gambling habit to her husband. Luker might also have offered Juliana more money with which to continue gambling and Juliana might also have been motivated by disillusionment fuelled by her husband's neglect. Langdale Pike confirms her gambling addiction. The fact that her husband has an office at home confirms that she had access to business-related documents (the maid to Mrs Blake mentions this home office). Malcolm Ploughman, although he specialises in espionage of an undisclosed nature, was not hired by Horace Luker. They met in Raven & Rat to discuss how Ploughman might work for Luker; soon afterwards, however, Luker enlisted Juliana Blake, leaving Ploughman without a job.
6. He was uncertain about the details of the relationship between Mrs Blake and Horace Luker. However, he knew that Luker was receiving information from her via Dobell Books. He also inferred that Mrs Blake was unhappy about the situation and he intended to help her. This suggests that he could not read whatever information passed between them through his bookstore (if he tried). He kept the newspaper for July 4th because, upon reading the advertisement for Luker Textiles and the report on Blake and Sullivan's, he suspected that he finally understood what Mrs Blake was passing to Horace Luker. Bonus observation: The burned

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death threat, which Denny Boland received from the Sam-Brett gang, might be a forgery designed to incriminate them, given Mr Boland's skills. Equally, the Sam-Brett gang might have attempted to warn Denny Boland that Ned Blake was having Horace Luker followed and that he might confront Boland about the rumours of an affair between his wife and Horace Luker.

7. The Sam-Brett gang was preparing fake travel papers for Horace Luker so that he could travel to India without the knowledge of his commercial rivals. As evidence, decode the newspaper clippings provided by Inspector Lestrade's agent at Spaniard's. Decode the messages by using the prices to indicate which words to read. For example, the code £7.8/£14.18 means read the seventh, eighth, fourteenth and eighteenth words. Thus, one of the clippings can be decoded as follows: Owner of dog has found that I need to conduct further training; otherwise, papers will be withheld for the duration. Traveling to places excluding Italy, Frank and India, which cannot occur. People enjoy incognito phrases.

Sherlock Holmes solved this case using five leads. He used the newspaper articles related to Luker Textiles, Blake & Sullivan Textiles, and the report *Furore at Popular Rare Books Dealer*. He followed the directions to Jennifer Olmstead's address. Then he visited Mrs Blake, Mr Blake's office and, later, the home of Forrest Renfield. He also interview John Cloyd.

