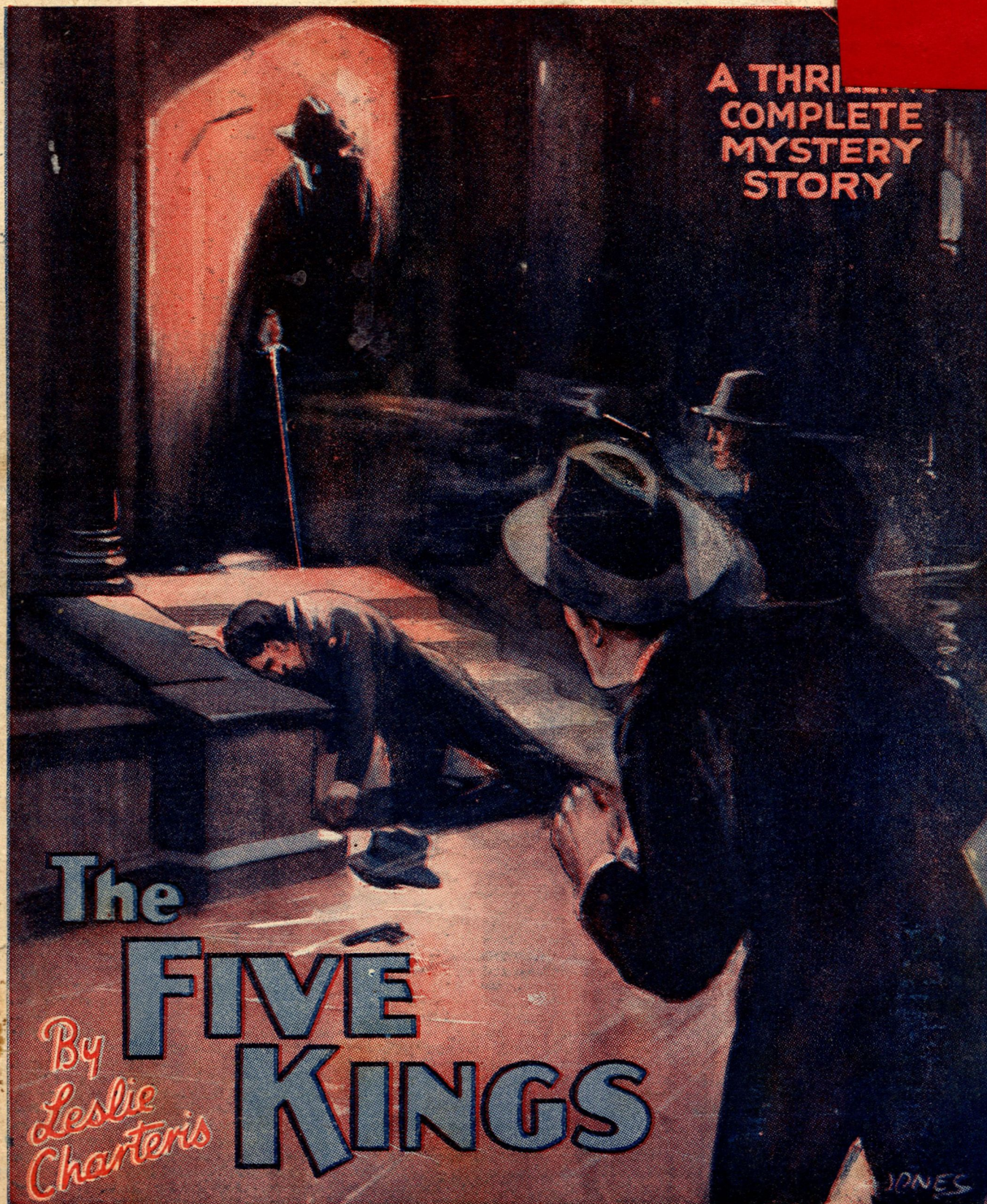


THE THRILLER

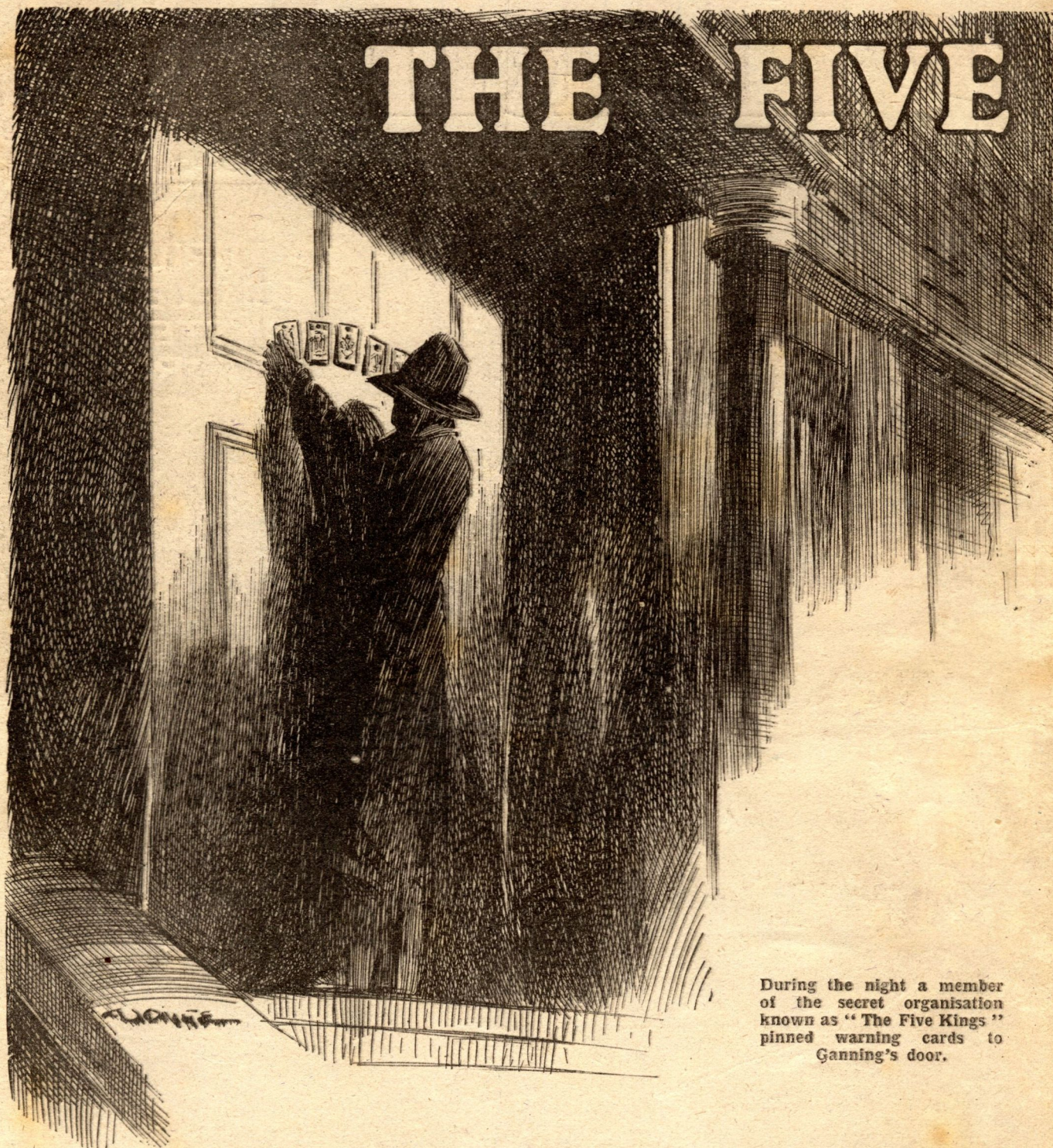
THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

A THRILLING
COMPLETE
MYSTERY
STORY



The
FIVE
KINGS
By
Leslie
Charteris

THE FIVE



During the night a member of the secret organisation known as "The Five Kings" pinned warning cards to Ganning's door.

Chapter I. THE TWISTER.

MR. "SNAKE" GANNING was neither a great criminal nor a pleasant character, but he is interesting because he was the first victim of the organisation known as the Five Kings, which was destined in the course of a few months to spread terror through the underworld of London—that ruthless association of reckless young men, brilliantly led, who worked on the side of the law, and who were yet outside the law.

There was to come a time when the mere mention of the Five Kings was sufficient to fill the most unimaginative malefactor with uneasy fears, when a man returning home late one night to find the sign of the Five—

the four Kings from an ordinary pack of playing cards, with the Joker in the centre—spread out fanwise and nailed to his door with a drawing-pin, would be sent instinctively spinning round with his back to the nearest wall and his hand flying to his hip pocket, and an icy tingle of dread prickling up his spine; but at the date of the Ganning episode the Five Kings had only just commenced operations, and their name had not yet come to be surrounded with the aura of almost supernatural infallibility which it was to earn for itself later.

Mr. Ganning was a tall, incredibly thin man, with sallow features and black hair that was invariably oiled and brushed to a shiny sleekness. His head was small and

round, and he carried it thrust forward to the full stretch of his long neck.

Taking into the combination of physical characteristics, the sinuous carriage of his body, the glittering beadiness of his expressionless black eyes, and the silent litheness with which he moved, it was easy to appreciate the aptness of his nickname.

He was the leader of a particularly tough racecourse gang, generally known as "The Snake's Boys," which subsisted in unmerited luxury on the proceeds of blackmailing bookmakers under threat of doing them grievous bodily harm; there were also a number of other unsavoury things about him which may be revealed in due course.

The actual motive for the interference of the Five Kings in the affairs of the Snake

KINGS

A THRILLING COMPLETE STORY of THE UNDERWORLD.

By Leslie Charteris



and his boys, was their treatment of Tommy Mitre on the occasion of his first venture into Turf finance.

Tommy had always wanted to be a jockey, for horses were in his blood; but quite early in his apprenticeship he had been thrown and injured so severely that he had never been able to ride again, and he had had to content himself with the humble position of stable boy in a big training establishment.

Then an uncle of Tommy's, who had been a publican, died, leaving his nephew the tremendous fortune of two hundred pounds, and Tommy decided to try his luck in the Silver Ring.

He took out a licence, had a board painted—"Tommy Mitre—The Old Firm—Established 1822"—and enlisted a clerk.

One day he went down to Brighton with this paraphernalia and the remains of his two hundred pounds, and it was not long before the Snake's boys spotted the stranger and made the usual demands. Tommy refused to pay. He ought to have known better, for the methods of the Snake had never been a secret in racing circles; but Tommy was like that—stubborn.

He told the Snake exactly where he could go, and as a result Tommy Mitre was soundly beaten up by the Snake's boys when he was leaving the course, and his capital

and his day's profits were taken. And it so happened that Simon Templar had elected to enjoy a day's racing at Brighton, and had observed the beating-up from a distance.

Snake Ganning and a select committee of the boys spent the evening in Brighton celebrating, and left for London by a late train. So also did Simon Templar.

Thus it came to pass that the said Simon Templar (he was much better known in a number of places as "The Saint"—ostensibly from his initials, but more credibly from the saintly manner in which he did the most unsaintly things) wandered up the platform a couple of minutes before the train left, espied the Snake and three of the boys comfortably ensconced in a first-class carriage, and promptly joined them.

The Saint, it should be understood, was a vision that gave plenty of excuse for the glances of pleased anticipation which were exchanged by the Snake and his favourite boys as soon as they had summed him up. In what he called his "fighting kit"—which consisted of disreputable grey flannel bags and a tweed shooting-jacket of almost legendary age—the Saint had the unique gift of appearing so immaculate that the least absent-minded commissioner might

have been pardoned for mistaking him for a millionaire duke.

It may be imagined what a radiant spectacle he was in what he called his "gentleman disguise."

His grey flannel suit fitted him with a staggering perfection,

the whiteness of his shirt was dazzling, his tie shamed the rainbow. His soft felt hat appeared to be having its first outing since it left Bond Street. His chamois gloves were clearly being shown to the world for the first time.

On his left wrist was a gold watch, and he carried a gold-mounted ebony walking-stick.

Everything, you understand, quietly, but unmistakably, of the very best, and worn with that unique air of careless elegance which others might attempt to emulate, but which only the Saint could achieve in all its glory.

As for the man—well, the Snake's boys had never had any occasion to doubt that their reputation for toughness was founded on more substantial demonstrations than displays of their skill at hunt-the-slipper at the Y.M.C.A. on Saturday afternoons. The man was tall—about six feet two inches of him—but they didn't take much count of that.

Their combined heights totted up to twenty-four feet three inches. And although he wasn't at all hefty, he was broad enough, and there was a certain solidity about his shoulders that would have made a cautious man think carefully before starting any unpleasantness—but that didn't

both the Snake and his boys. Their combined widths summed up to a shade over six feet.

And the Saint had a clear tanned skin and very clear blue eyes—but even that failed to worry them. They weren't running a beauty competition, anyway.

The important point was that the Saint had a gold cigarette-case and a large wad of bank-notes. In his innocent way, he counted over his pile before their very eyes, announced the total at two hundred and fifty pounds odd, and invited them to congratulate him on his luck.

They congratulated him politely. They remarked on the slowness of the train, and the Saint agreed that it was a boring journey. He said he wished there was some sort of entertainment provided by the railway company for the diversion of passengers on boring journeys. Somebody produced a pack of cards.

It can be said for them that they gave him the credit for having been warned by his grandmother about the danger of trying to find the lady. The game selected was poker.

The Saint apologetically warned them that he had only played poker once before in his life, but they said kindly that that didn't matter a bit.

The fight started just five minutes before the train reached Victoria, and the porters who helped the Snake and his boys out of the compartment were not thanked. They gave the boys a bucket of water with which to revive the Snake himself, but they couldn't do anything about his two black eyes or his missing front teeth.

Inspector Teal, who was waiting on the platform in the hope of seeing a much-wanted con-man, saw the injured warriors, and was not sympathetic.

"You've been fighting, Snake," he remarked brightly.

Ganning's reply was unprintable, but Mr. Teal was not easily shocked.

"But I can describe him to you," said the Snake, becoming less profane. "Robbery with violence, that's what it was. He set on us—"

"'Sat' is the past tense of 'sit,'" said Teal, shifting his gum to the other side of his mouth.

"He's got away with over three hundred quid that we made to-day."

Teal was interested.

"Where d'you make it?" he inquired.

"Have you got a real printing-press, or do you do it by hand? I didn't know you were in the 'slush' game, Snake."

"Look here, Teal," said Ganning, becoming more coherent. "You can say what you like about me, but I've got my rights, the same as anybody else. You've got to get after that man. Maybe you know things about him already. He's either on a lay, or he's just starting on one, you mark my words. See this!"

Mr. Teal examined the envelope sleepily. "What is it?" he asked. "A letter of introduction to me?"

"He gave it to Ted when he got out. That's my receipt," he said. "Didn't he, Ted? You look inside, Teal!"

The envelope was not sealed. Teal turned it over, and remarked on the flap the crest of the hotel which had provided it. Then, in his lethargic way, he drew out the contents—five soiled playing cards.

"The four kings, and the joker," he drawled. "Quite a nice poker hand, but it don't mean anything to me outside of that. You boys have been reading too many detective stories lately, that's what's the trouble with you."

A BAD DEAL.

THE SAINT, being a man of decidedly luxurious tastes, was the tenant of a flat in Brook Street, Mayfair, which was so far beyond his means that he had long since given up worrying about the imminence of bankruptcy. One might as well be hung for a sheep, the Saint reflected, in his cheerfully reckless way, as for a foot-and-mouth-diseased lamb.

He considered that the world owed him a good time, in return for services rendered and general presentability and good-fellowship; and, since the world hitherto had been close-fistedly reluctant to recognise the obligation and meet it, the Saint had decided that the time had come for him to assert himself.

His invasion of Brook Street had been one of the first moves in the campaign.

But the locality had one distinct advantage that had nothing to do with the prestige of its address; and this advantage was the fact that it possessed a mews—a very small and exclusive mews—situated at a distance of less than the throw of a small stone from the Saint's front door.

In this mews were a number of very expensive garages, large, small, and of Austin Seven size. And the Saint owned two of these large garages. In one he kept his own car; the other had been empty for a week, until he had begun smuggling an assortment of curious objects into it at dead

of night—objects which only by the most frantic stretch of imagination could have been associated with cars.

If the Saint had been observed on any of these surreptitious trips, it is highly probable that his sanity would have been doubted. Not that he would have cared, for he had his own reasons for his apparent eccentricity.

But, as it was, no one noticed his goings-out or his comings-in, and there was no comment.

And even if he had been noticed, it is very doubtful if he would have been recognised. It was the immaculate Saint who left Brook Street and drove to Chelsea and garaged his car near Fulham Road. Then, by a very subtle change of carriage, it was a not-nearly-so-immaculate Saint who walked through a maze of dingy back streets to a house in which one, Bertie Marks, a bird of passage, had a stuffy and microscopical apartment.

And it was a shabby, slouching, down-at-heel Bertie Marks who left the apartment and returned to the West End on the plebeian bus, laden with the packages that he had purchased on his way, and who shambled inconspicuously into the mews off

Brook Street and into the garage which he held in his own name. The Saint did not believe in being unnecessarily careless about details.

And all these elaborate preparations—the taking of the second garage and the Chelsea apartment, and the creation of the character of Bertie Marks—had been made for one single purpose, which was put into execution on a certain day.

A few hours after dawn on that day (an unearthly hour for the Saint to be abroad) a small van bearing the name of Carter Paterson turned into the mews and stopped there.

Bertie Marks climbed down from the driver's seat, wiping grimy hands on his corduroys, and fished out a key, with which he opened the door of his garage. Then he went back to his van, drove it into the garage, and closed the doors behind him.

He knew that his action must have excited the curiosity of the car-washing parade of chauffeurs congregated in the mews, but he wasn't bothering about that. With the consummation of his plan, the necessity for the continued existence of Bertie Marks was rapidly nearing its end.

"Let 'em wonder!" thought the Saint carelessly, as he peeled off his grubby jacket.

He switched on the light, and went and peeped out into the mews. The car-washing parade had resumed its labours, being for the moment too preoccupied to bother about the strange phenomenon of a Carter Paterson van being driven into a garage that had once housed a Rolls.

The Saint gently slid a bar across the door to shut out any inquisitive explorers, and got to work.

The van, on being opened, disclosed a number of large wooden packing-cases, which the Saint proceeded to unload on to the floor of the garage.

This done, he fetched from a corner a mallet and chisel, and began to prise open the cases and extract their contents. In each case, packed in with wood shavings, were two dozen china jars.

As each case was emptied, the Saint carried the jars over to the light and inspected them minutely. He was not at all surprised to find that, whereas the majority of the jars were perfectly plain, all the jars in one case were marked with a tiny cross in the glazing. These jars the Saint set aside, for they were the only ones in which he was interested. They were exactly what he had expected to find, and they provided his entire motive for the temporary and occasional sinking of his own personality in the alias of Mr. Marks.

The other jars he replaced in their respective cases, and carefully closed and roped each case to look as it had been before he tampered with it.

Then he opened the marked jars, and poured out their contents into a bucket. In another corner of the garage was a pile of little tins, and in each jar the Saint placed one of these tins, padding the space that was left with cotton wool to prevent rattling.

The jars so treated were replaced one by one in their case, which in its turn was also nailed up again and roped as before—after the Saint, with a little smile plucking at the corners of his mouth, had carefully laid a souvenir of his intervention on top of the last layer of wood shavings.

He had worked quickly. Only an hour and a half had elapsed from the time when he drove into the garage to the time when he lifted the last case back into the van; and when that had been done he unbarred the garage doors and opened them wide.

The remains of the car-washing parade

"THE SECRET of THE TONG"

By

HUGH CLEVELY

is the special long complete novel in next week's issue of

"The THRILLER."

looked up puzzledly as the van came backing out of the garage; it registered an even greater perplexity when the van proceeded to drive out of the mews and vanish in the direction of Bond Street. It yelled to the driver that he had forgotten to close his garage after him, but Mr. Marks either did not hear or did not care.

And when the parade perceived that Mr. Marks had gone for good, it went and pried into the garage, and scratched its heads over the litter of wood shavings on the floor, the mallet and chisel and nails and hammer, and two or three tins which the Saint had found no space for, and which he had accordingly left behind. But the bucket of white powder had gone, riding beside Mr. Marks in the front of the van; and very few people ever saw Mr. Marks again.

The van drove to an address in the West End, and there Mr. Marks delivered the cases at the premises of a firm trading under the name of Laserre, secured a signature to a receipt, and departed, heading further west.

On his way, he stopped at St. George's Hospital, where he left his bucket. The man who took charge of it was puzzled, but Mr. Marks was in a hurry, and had neither the time nor the inclination to enlighten him.

"Take great care of it, because it's worth more money than you'll ever have," he directed. "See that it gets to one of the doctors, and give him this note with it."

And the Saint went back to the wheel of his van and drove away, feeling that he was nearing the end of an excellent day's work.

He drove to the Great West Road, and out of London towards Maidenhead. Somewhere along that road he turned off into a side lane, and there he stopped for a few minutes out of sight of the main traffic. Inside the van was a large pot of paint, and the Saint used it energetically. He had never considered himself an artist, but he man-handled that van with the broad, sweeping touch of a master.

Under his vigorous wielding of the brush, the sign of Carter Paterson, which he had been at some pains to execute artistically the night before, vanished entirely; and the van became plain. Satisfied with the obliteration of the handiwork which only a few hours before he had admired so much, the Saint resumed the wheel and drove back to London.

The paint he had used was guaranteed quick-drying, and it lived up to the word of its guarantee. It collected a good deal of dust on the return voyage, and duly dried with a somewhat soiled aspect, which was a very fair imitation of the condition in which Mr. Marks had received it.

He delivered it to its home garage at Shepherd's Bush, and paid twenty-four hours' hire. Some time later, Mr. Marks returned to Chelsea.

A little later still, the not-so-immaculate Simon Templar turned into another garage and collected his trim blue Furillac speedster, in which he drove to his club in Dover Street.

Suddenly the race gang was upon him. A crashing blow, and he sank to the ground unconscious.



And the Simon Templar who sauntered through to the bar and called for a pint of beer must have been one of the most impeccably immaculate men that that haunt of impeccably immaculate young men had ever sheltered.

"We don't often see you as early as this, sir," remarked the barman.

"May it be many years before you see me as early as this again, son," answered the Saint piously. "But this morning I felt I just had to get up and go for a drive. It was such a beautiful morning."

ENTER MR. HAYN.

MR. EDGAR HAYN was a man of many interests. He was the proud proprietor of "Danny's," a night club in a squalid street off Shaftesbury Avenue, and he also controlled the destinies of the firm of Laserre, which was a small, but expensive shop in Regent Street that retailed perfumes, powders, rouges, creams, and all the other preparations essential to modern feminine face-repair.

These two establishments were Mr. Hayn's especial pets, and from them he derived the greater part of his substantial income.

Yet it might be mentioned that the profits of "Danny's" were not entirely earned by the sale of champagne, and the adornment of fashionable beauty was not the principal source of the prosperity of the house of Laserre.

Mr. Hayn was a clever organiser, and what he did not know about the art of covering his tracks wouldn't have been missed from one of the microscopical two-guinea alabaster jars in which he sold the celebrated Crème Laserre.

He was a big, heavy-featured man, clean-shaven, pink-complexioned, and faintly bald. His name had not always been Hayn, but a process of naturalisation followed by a deed poll, had given him an indisputable legal right to forget the cognomen of his

father—and, incidentally, had eliminated for ever the unpleasant possibility of a deportation order, an exercise of forethought for which Mr. Hayn was more than once moved to give his sagacity a pat on the back.

The police knew certain things about him which made them inclined to regard him with disfavour, and they suspected a lot more, but there had never been any evidence.

He was writing letters at the big knee-hole desk in his private office at "Danny's" when Ganning arrived. The knock on the door did not make him look up. He said: "Come in!" But the sound of the opening and closing of the door was, to him, sufficient indication that the order had been obeyed; and he went on to finish the letter he had been drafting.

Only when that was done did he condescend to notice the presence of his visitor. "You're late, Snake," he said, blotting the sheet carefully.

"Sorry, boss."

Mr. Hayn screwed the cap on his fountain-pen, replaced it in his pocket, and raised his eyes from the desk for the first time. What he saw made him sag back in astonishment.

"Who on earth have you been picking a quarrel with?" he demanded.

The Snake certainly looked the worse for wear. A bandage round his head covered one eye, and the eye that was visible was nearly closed up. His lips were bruised and swollen, and a distinct lack of teeth made him speak with a painful lisp.

"Was it Harrigan's crowd?" suggested Hayn.

Ganning shook his head.

"A bloke we met on the train coming back from Brighton last night."

"Were you alone?"

"Nope. Ted and Bill were with me. And Mario."

"And what was this man trooping round? A regiment?"

"He was alone."

Hayn blinked.

"How did it happen?"

"We thought he was a sucker," explained the Snake disgustedly. "Smart clothes, gold cigarette-case, gold-mounted stick, gold watch—and a wad. He showed us his wad. Two-fifty, he said it was. We couldn't let that go, so we got him into a game of cards. Poker. He said he didn't know anything about the game, so it looked safe enough—he struck us as being that sort of mug."

"We were geeing him along nicely right up to ten minutes or so before Victoria, and we'd let him take fifty off us. He was thinking himself the greatest poker player in the world by then, you'd have said. Then we asked him to be a sport and give us a chance to get our money back on a couple of big jack-pots with a five-pound ante. He agreed, and we let him win the first one. We all threw in after the first rise."

"What about making it a tanner ante for the last deal?" I said, tipping the wink to the boys. He wasn't too keen on that, but we jollied him along, and at last he fell for it. It was his deal, but I shuffled the broads for him."

"And your hand slipped?"

Ganning snorted.

"Slipped nothin'! My hand doesn't slip. I'd got that deck stacked better than any conjurer could have done it. And I picked up a straight flush, just as I'd fixed it."

"Mario chucked in right away, and Ted and Bill dropped out after the first round. That left the mug and me, and we went on raising each other till every cent the boys and I could find between us was in the kitty. We even turned in our links and Mario's diamond pin to account for as much of the mug's wad as possible."

"When we hadn't another bean to stake, he saw me. I showed down my straight flush, and I was just getting set to scoop in the pool when he stopped me. 'I thought you told me this was next to unbeatable,' he says, and he shows down five kings."

"Five?" repeated Mr. Hayn, frowning.

"We were playing deuces wild, and a joker. He'd got the joker."

"Well, didn't you know what he was holding?"

"It wasn't the hand I fixed for him to deal himself!"

Mr. Hayn controlled his features.

"And then you cut up rough, and got the worst of it?"

"I accused him of cheating. He didn't deny it. He had the nerve to say: 'Well, you were supposed to be teaching me the game, and I saw you were cheating all the time, so I thought it was allowed by the rules!' And he started putting away our pile. Of course, we cut up rough!"

"And he cut up rougher?" suggested Hayn.

"He didn't fight fair," said Ganning aggrievedly. "First thing I knew, he'd jabbed the point of his stick into Ted's neck before Ted had a chance to pull his cosh, so Ted was out of it. Bill was all ready for a fair stand-up fight with the knuckle-dusters, but this man kicked him in the stomach, so he took the count. Mario and me had to tackle him alone."

The Snake seemed disinclined to proceed further with the description of the battle, and Hayn tactfully refrained from pressing him. He allowed the Snake to brood blackly over the memory for a few moments.

"He wasn't an amateur," said Ganning. "But none of us could place him. I'd give the devil of a lot to find out who he was. One of these fly mobsmen you read about, I shouldn't wonder. He'd got all the dope."

"Look at this," said the Snake, producing an envelope. "He shoved that at Ted when he got out. Said it was his receipt. It's just the hand he won the last kitty on. I tried to get Teal to take it up—he was at the station—but he wouldn't take it seriously. I thought they might be able to trace him by the cards, but they were our own—the ones we were playing with."

Hayn slipped the cards out of the envelope and fanned them out on his desk. Probably he had not fully grasped the purport of Ganning's description, for the effect the sight had on him was amazing.

If Ganning had been disappointed with Inspector Teal's unemotional reception of the Saint's receipt, he was fully compensated by the reaction of Mr. Edgar Hayn.

Hayn's pink face went suddenly white, and he jerked away from the five cards that lay on the blotter in front of him as if they had spat poison at him.

"What's it mean to you, boss?" asked the bewildered Ganning.

"This morning we got a consignment over from Germany," Hayn answered, speaking almost in a whisper. "When Braddon opened the case, there were the four kings and the joker on top of the packing. We couldn't figure out how they came there."

"Have you looked the stuff over yet?" demanded the Snake, instantly alert.

Hayn shook his head. He was still staring, as though hypnotised, at the five kings.

"We didn't think anything of it. There's never been a hitch yet. Braddon thought the men who packed the case must have been having a game—they might have got a hand of cards shut up in the box through carelessness. We just put the marked jars away in the usual place."

"You haven't had to touch them yet?"

Hayn made a negative gesture. He reached out a shaky hand for the telephone, while Ganning sat silently chewing over the startling possibilities that were revealed by this information.

"Hallo! Regent nine double-o four seven—please!"

Hayn fidgetted nervously as he waited for the call to be put through. It came after what seemed an eternity.

"Hallo! That you, Braddon? I want



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HERE COMES CLEVELY! THE EDITOR GREET'S YOU

IN this issue of The THRILLER we have a long complete novel, "The Five Kings," by Leslie Charteris. A stronger or more versatile author could not possibly be found, and I am proud that we are able to include him as a regular contributor to this paper. Mr. Charteris is one of those authors who make it easy to maintain our high standard of one hundred per cent good stories. The THRILLER is now a growing lad—and a mighty healthy one at that—which, of course, is your reply to our efforts to give you only the best. Our huge circulation is the envy of our competitors. Several friends in the Street of Ink have congratulated me, at the same time inquiring, "How do you do it?" My reply is ever the same: "Good stories! Better stories! Best stories ever offered for twopence weekly!"

Next week I am positively certain that the special feature—the book-length novel—will meet with all-round satisfaction, for the reason Hugh Clevely, the author who wrote "Lynch Law," in our second number, writes "The Secret of the Tong." No race is more mysterious to the Western mind than the "heathen Chinese," and Mr. Clevely, who knows his subject thoroughly, will give you a real pen-picture of the persistent and tenacious antagonism existing between the various sects and secret tongs of the yellow people. Mr. Clevely's story will prove equal to all of those we have already published.

Many readers have asked the best method of keeping their copies of The THRILLER clean and in good order until

the first volume is complete, when they intend having the whole bound. I suggest they purchase from any stationers' a cheap paper folding file, of which there are many on the market. These will comfortably hold as many as thirteen or more copies, prove serviceable, and be comparatively cheap.

Another important feature of next week's issue will be the first long instalment of our new serial, "The Little Black Joss," by John G. Brandon. This enthralling story will prove yet another "good thing" for readers of The THRILLER, and as Mr. Brandon has a large and enthusiastic following, there is certain to be a big demand for next week's THRILLER. Make sure of your copy by ordering to-day, otherwise your newsagent may be sold out.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

Brief replies:

Thanks, Mrs. G. S., of Thornton-le-Fylde.—I am glad you like the stories appearing in The THRILLER, and will remember your remarks.

H. R. C., New Malden, Surrey.—Your suggestion may be put into operation a little later, or when space permits.

you to get out the marked jars that came over in the case with the cards in—you remember? Never mind why!"

A minute ticked away, while Hayn kept the receiver glued to his ear and tapped out an impatient tattoo on the desk.

"Yes? What's that? How d'you know? I see. Well, I'll be right round!"

Hayn clicked the receiver back and slewed his swivel chair round so that he faced Snake Ganning.

"What's he say?" asked the Snake.

"There's just a tin of Keating's powder in each," Hayn replied. "I asked him how he knew what it was, and he said the whole tin was there, label and all, packed in with cotton wool to make it fit. There was ten thousand pounds' worth of snow in that shipping, and the Five Kings have lifted the lot!"

THE JOKER.

"You may decant some beer, son," said Simon Templar, stretching himself out in an armchair. "And then you may start right in and tell me the story of your life. I can spare you about two minutes."

Jerry Stannard travelled obediently over to a side table where bottles and glasses were already set out, accomplished his task with a practised hand, and travelled back again with the results.

"Your health," said the Saint, and two foaming glasses were half-emptied in an appreciative silence.

Stannard was then encouraged to proceed. He put down his glass with a sigh and settled back at his ease, while the Saint made a long arm for the cigarette-box.

"I can't make out yet why you should have interested yourself in me," Stannard said.

"That's my affair," said the Saint bluntly. "And if it comes to that, son, I'm not a philanthropic institution. I happen to want an assistant, and I propose to make use of you. Not that you won't get anything out of it. I'm sufficiently interested in you to want to help you, but you're going to pay your way."

Stannard nodded.

"It's decent of you to think I'm worth it," he said.

He had not forgotten—it would have been impossible to forget such an incident in two days—the occasion of his first meeting the Saint. Hayn, of evil repute, had entrusted this man Stannard with a small packet which he had been told to take to an address in Piccadilly; and even if he had not been told what the packet contained, he could not have helped having a very shrewd idea. And, therefore, when a heavy hand had fallen suddenly on his shoulder only a few minutes after he had left Mr. Hayn, he had had no hope.

And then the miracle had happened, although he did not realise at the time that it was a miracle. A man had brushed against him as the detective turned to hail a taxi, and the man had turned to apologise.

In that crisis, all Stannard's faculties had been keyed up to the vivid super-sensitiveness which comes just before breaking point; and that abnormal acuteness had combined with the peculiarly keen stare which had accompanied the stranger's apology, so that the stranger's face was indelibly engraved on Stannard's memory.

The Saint took a little package from his pocket, and weighed it reflectively in his hand.

"Forty-eight hours ago," he murmured, "you assumed, quite rightly, that you were booked for five years' penal servitude. Instead of that, you're a free man. The triumphant sleuths of Vine Street found



The detective took the cards from the gangster and studied them. "The four kings and a joker," he murmured. "H'm, quite a nice poker hand."

nothing on you, and had to release you with apologies. Doubtless they're swearing to make up for that bloomer, and make no mistake about landing you with the goods next time, but that can't hurt you for the moment. And I expect you're still wondering what's going to be my price for having picked your pocket in the nick of time."

"I've been wondering ever since."

"I'm just going to tell you," said the Saint. "But first we'll get rid of this."

He left the room with the packet, and through the open door came the sound of running water. In a few moments he was back, dusting his hands.

"That disposes of the evidence," he said. "Now I want you to tell me something. How did you get into this dope game?"

Stannard shrugged.

"You may as well know. There's no heroic or clever reason. It's just because I'm a waster. I was in the wrong set at Cambridge, and I knew most of the toughs in town. Then my father died and left me without a bean. I tried to get a job, but I couldn't do anything useful. And all the time, naturally, I was mixing with the same bad bunch. Eventually they roped me in. I suppose I ought to have fought against it, but I just hadn't the guts. It was easy money, and I took it. That's all."

There was a short silence, during which the Saint blew monotonously regular smoke-rings towards the ceiling.

"Now I'll tell you something," he said. "I've made all the inquiries I need to make about you. I know your family history for two generations back, your early life, your school record—everything. I know enough to judge that you don't belong where you are now. For one thing, I know you're engaged to a rather nice girl, and she's worried about you. She doesn't know anything, but she suspects. And you're worried. You're not as quiet and comfortable in this crime racket as you'd like to make out. You weren't cut for a bad man. Isn't that true?"

"True enough," Stannard said flatly. "I'd give anything to be out of it."

"And you're straight about this girl—Gwen Chandler?"

"Straight as a die. Honest, Templar! But what can I do? If I drop Hayn's crowd, I shan't have a cent. Besides, I don't know that they'd let me drop out. I owe money. When I was at Cambridge, I lost a small fortune—for me—in Hayn's gambling rooms, and he's got I.O.U.'s of mine for

close on a thousand. I've been extravagant—I've run up bills everywhere. You can't imagine how badly in the cart I am!"

"On the contrary, son," said the Saint calmly, "I've a very good guess about that. That's why you're here now. I wanted an agent inside Hayn's gang, and I ran through the whole deck before I chose you."

He rose from his chair and took a turn up and down the room. Stannard waited; and presently the Saint stopped abruptly.

"You're all right," he said.

Stannard frowned

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I'm going to trust you. I'm going to take you in with me for this campaign. I'll get you enough out of it to square off your debts, and at the end of it I'll find you a job. You'll keep in with Hayn, but you'll be working for me. And you'll give me your word of honour that you'll go straight for the rest of your life. That's my offer. What about it?"

The Saint leant against the mantelpiece languidly enough, but there had been nothing languid about his crisp, incisive sentences. Thinking it over afterwards, it seemed to Stannard that the whole thing had been done in a few minutes, and he was left to marvel at the extraordinary force of personality which in such a short time could override the prejudice of years and rekindle a spark of decency that had been as good as dead. But at the instant Stannard could not analyse his feelings.

"I'm giving you a chance to get out and make good," the Saint went on. "I'm not doing it in the dark. I believe you when you say you'd be glad of a chance to make a fresh start. I believe there's the makings of a decent man in you. Anyway, I'll take a risk on it. I won't even threaten you, though I could, by telling you what I shall do to you if you double-cross me. I just ask you a fair question, and I want your answer now."

Stannard got to his feet.

"There's only one answer," he said, and held out his hand.

The Saint took it in a firm grip.

"Now I'll tell you exactly where you stand," he said.

He did so, speaking in curt sentences as before. His earlier grimness had relaxed somewhat, for when the Saint did anything he never did it by halves, and now he spoke to Stannard as a friend and an ally.

He had his reward in the eager attention with which the youngster followed his discourse. He told him everything that there was any need for him to know.

"You've got to think of everything, and then a heap, if you're going to come out of this with a whole skin," Simon concluded, with some of his former sternness. "The game I'm on isn't the kind they play in nurseries. I'm on it because I just can't live happily ever after. I've had enough adventures to fill a dozen books, but instead of satisfying me they've only left me with a bigger appetite. If I had to live the ordinary kind of safe civilised life, I'd die

of boredom. Risks are food and drink to me."

"You may be different. If you are, I'm sorry about it, but I can't help it. I need some help in this, and you're going to give it; but it wouldn't be fair to let you whale in without showing you what you're up against. Your bunch of bad hats aren't childish enemies. Before you're through, London's likely to be just about as healthy for you as the Cannibal Islands are for a nice plump missionary. Get me?"

Stannard intimated that he had got him. "Then I'll give you your orders for the immediate future," said the Saint.

He did so, in detail, and had everything repeated over to him twice before he was convinced that there would be no mistake, and that nothing would be forgotten.

"From now on, I want you to keep away from me till I give you the all-clear," he ended up. "If the Snake's anywhere around, I shan't last long in Danny's, and it's essential to keep you out of suspicion for as long as possible. So this'll be our last open meeting for some time, but you can communicate by telephone—as long as you make sure nobody can hear you."

"Right you are, Saint," said Stannard.

Simon Templar flicked a cigarette into his mouth and reached for the matches.

The other had a queer transient feeling of unreality. It seemed fantastic that he should be associated with such a project as that into which the Saint had initiated him.

It seemed equally fantastic that the Saint should have conceived it and brought it into being. That cool, casual young man, with his faultless clothes, his clipped and slangy speech, and his quick, clear smile—he ought to have been lounging his amiable, easy-going way through a round of tennis and cricket and cocktail-parties and dances, instead of—

And yet it remained credible—it was even, with every passing second, becoming almost an article of the re-awakened Stannard's new faith. The Saint's spell was unique. There was a certain quiet assurance about his bearing, a certain steely quality that came sometimes into his blue eyes, a certain indefinable air of strength and recklessness and quixotic bravado, that made the whole fantastic notion acceptable.

And Stannard had not even the advantage of knowing anything about the last eight years of the Saint's hell-for-leather career—eight years of gay buccaneering which, even allowing for exaggeration, made him out to be a man of no ordinary or drawing-room toughness.

The Saint lighted his cigarette and held out his hand to terminate the interview; and the corners of his mouth were twitching to his irresistible smile.

"So long, son," he said. "And good hunting!"

"Same to you," said Stannard warmly.

The Saint clapped him on the shoulder.

"I know you won't let me down," he said.

"There's lots of good in you, and I guess I've found some of it. You'll pull out all right. I'm going to see that you do. Watch me!"

But before he left, Stannard got a query off his chest.

"Didn't you say there were five kings?"

His hands in his pockets, teetering gently on his heels, the Saint favoured Stannard with his most saintly smile.

"I did," he drawled. "Four, that is, and a joker. I am the joker—the most versatile card in the pack. As for the other four, they are like the Great White Woolly Wugga-Wugga on the plains of Astrakhan."

Stannard gaped at him.

"What does that mean?" he demanded.

"I ask you, sweet child," answered the Saint, with that exasperatingly seraphic smile still on his lips, "has anyone ever seen a Great White Woolly Wugga-Wugga on the plains of Astrakhan? Sleep on it, my cherub—it will keep your mind from disturbing thoughts."

THE NIGHT CLUB.



To all official intents and purposes, the proprietor and leading light of Mr. Edgar Hayn's night club in Soho was the man after whom it was named—Danny Trask.

Danny was short and stumpy, a lazy little tub of a man, with a round, red face, a sparse head of fair hair, and a thin, sandy moustache. His pale eyes were deeply imbedded in the creases of their fleshy lids; and when he smiled—which was often, and usually for no apparent reason—they vanished altogether in a corrugating mesh of wrinkles.

His intelligence was not very great. Nevertheless, he had discovered quite early in life that there was a comfortable living to be made in the profession of "dummy"—a job which calls for no startling intellectual gifts—and Danny had accordingly made that his vocation ever since.

As a figurehead, he was all that could have been desired, for he was unobtrusive and easily satisfied.

He had a type of mind common to his class of law-breaker. As long as his salary—which was not small—was paid regularly, he never complained, showed no ambition to join his employer on a more equal basis of division of profits, and, if anything went wrong, kept his mouth shut and deputised for his principal in one of His Majesty's prisons without a murmur.

Danny's fees for a term of imprisonment were a flat rate of ten pounds a week, with an extra charge of two pounds a week for "hard." The astuteness of the C.I.D., and the carelessness of one or two of his previous employers, had made this quite a profitable proposition for Danny.

He had visions of retiring one day, and ending his life in comparative luxury, when his savings had reached a sufficiently large figure; but this hope had received several set-backs of late. He had been in Mr. Hayn's service for four years, and Mr. Hayn's uncanny skill at avoiding the attentions of the police were becoming a thorn in the side of Danny Trask.

When Danny was not in "stir," the most he could command was a paltry seven pounds a week, and living expenses had to be paid out of this instead of out of the pocket of the Government.

Danny felt that he had a personal grievance against Mr. Hayn on this account.

The club theoretically opened at 6 p.m., but the food was not good, and most of its members preferred to dine elsewhere. The first arrivals usually began to drift in about 10 p.m., but things never began to get exciting before 11 o'clock.

Danny spent the hours between six o'clock and the commencement of the fun, sitting in his shirt-sleeves in his little cubicle by the entrance, sucking a foul old briar and tentatively selecting the next day's losers from an evening paper.

He was incapable of feeling bored—his mind had never reached the stage of development where it could appreciate the idea of

activity and inactivity. It had never been active, so it didn't see any difference.

He was engaged in this pleasant pursuit towards eight o'clock on a certain evening when Jerry Stannard arrived.

"Has Mr. Hayn come in yet, Danny?"

Danny made a pencil note of the number of pounds which he had laboriously calculated that Wilco would have in hand over Man of Kent in the Lingfield Plate, folded his paper, and looked up.

"He don't usually come in till late, Mr. Stannard," he said. "No, he ain't here now."

Danny's utterances always contrived to put the cart before the horse. If he had wanted to give you a vivid description of a death-bed scene, he would inevitably have started with the funeral.

"Oh, it's all right—he's expecting me," said Stannard. "When he arrives you can tell him I'm at the bar."

He was plainly agitated. While he was talking, he never stopped fiddling with his signet-ring; and Danny, whose shrewd glances missed very little, noticed that his tie was limp and crooked, as if it had been subjected to the clumsy wrestling of shaky fingers.

"Right you are, sir!"

It was none of Danny's business, anyway.

"Oh—and before I forget—"

"Sir?"

"A Mr. Templar will be here later. He's O.K. Send down for me when he arrives, and I'll sign him in."

"Very good, sir."

Danny returned to his study of equine form, and Stannard passed on.

He went through the lounge which occupied the ground floor, and turned down the stairs at the end. Facing these stairs, behind a convenient curtain, was a secret door in the panelling, electrically operated, which was controlled by a button on the desk in Hayn's private office. This door, when opened, disclosed a flight of stairs running upwards.

These stairs communicated with the upstairs rooms, which were one of the most profitable features of the club, for in those rooms *chemin-de-fer*, poker, and *tréte-et-quarante* were played every night with the sky for a limit.

Hayn's office was at the foot of the downward flight. He had personally supervised the installation of an ingenious system of mirrors, by means of which, with the aid of a large sound-proof window let into the wall at one end of the office, without leaving his seat, he was able to inspect everyone who passed through the lounge above.

Moreover, when the secret door swung open in response to the pressure of his finger on the control button, a further system of mirrors panelled up the upper flight of stairs gave him a view right up the stairway itself and round the landing into the gaming-rooms.

Mr. Hayn was a man with a cunning turn of mind, and he was pre-eminently cautious.

Outside the office, in the basement, was the dance floor, surrounded with tables, but only two couples were dining there. At the far end was the dais on which the orchestra played, and at the other end, under the stairs, was the tiny bar.

Stannard turned in there, and roused the white-coated bar-tender from his perusal of *La Vie Parisienne*.

"I don't know what would meet the case," he said, "but I want something steep in corpse-revivers."

The man looked him over with an expert eye, and busied himself with the filling of a prescription. The result certainly had a

kick in it. Stannard was downing it when Hayn came in.

The big man was looking pale and tired, and there were shadows under his eyes. He nodded curtly to Jerry.

"I'll be with you in a minute," he said. "Just going to get a wash."

It was not like Mr. Hayn, who ordinarily specialised in the boisterous hail-fellow-well-met method of address, and Stannard watched him go thoughtfully.

Braddon, who had remained outside, followed Hayn into the office.

"Who is the boy friend?" he asked, taking a chair.

"Stannard?" Hayn was skimming through the letters that waited on his desk. "An ordinary young fool. He lost eight hundred upstairs in his first couple of months. Heaven knows how much he owes outside—he'd lost a packet before I started lending him money."

Braddon searched through his pockets for a cigar, and found one. He bit off the end, and spat.

"Got expectations? Rich papa who'll come across?"

"No. But he's got the clothes, and he'd pass anywhere. I was using him."

"Was?"

Hayn was frowningly examining the postmark on one of his letters.

"I suppose I shall still," he said. "Don't bother me—those Five Kings have got me all ends up. But he's got a fiancée—I've only recently seen her. I like her."

"Any good?"

"I shall arrange something about her."

Hayn had slit open the letter with his thumb-nail, but he only took one glance at what it contained. He tossed it over to Braddon, and it was the manager of Laserre who drew out the five cards.

"One of those came to my house by the first post this morning," Hayn said. "It's as old as the hills, that game. So they think they're going to rattle me!"

"Aren't they?" asked Braddon, in his heavily cynical way.

"No, they aren't!" Hayn came back savagely. "I've got the Snake, and the men who were with him prowling round the West End just keeping their eyes peeled for the man who beat them up in the Brighton train. If he's in London, he can't stay hid for ever. And when Ganning's found him, we'll soon put paid to his joke!"

Then he pulled himself together.

"I'm giving Stannard dinner," he said. "What are you doing now?"

"I'll loaf out and get some food, and be back later," said Braddon. "I thought I'd take a look in upstairs."

Hayn nodded. He ushered Braddon out of the office, and locked the door behind him, for even Braddon was not allowed to remain in that sanetum alone. Braddon departed, and Hayn rejoined Stannard at the bar.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, old man," he apologised, with an attempt to resume his pose of bluff geniality.

"I've been amusing myself," said Stannard, and indicated his glass. "Have a spot?"

Hayn accepted, and Stannard looked at his watch.

"By the way," he said, "there's a man due here in about an hour. I met him the other day, and he seemed all right. He said he was a South African, and he's sailing back the day after to-morrow. He was complaining that he couldn't get any real fun in England, so I dropped a hint about a private gambling club I might be able to get him into, and he jumped at it. I thought he might be some use—leaving England so soon, he could hardly make a kick—so I told him to join us over coffee. Is that all right?"

"Quite all right, old man." A thought struck Mr. Hayn. "You're sure he wasn't one of those clever dicks?"

"Not on your life!" scoffed Stannard. "I think I know a busy when I see one by now. I've seen enough of 'em dancing here. And this man seems to have money to burn."

Hayn nodded.

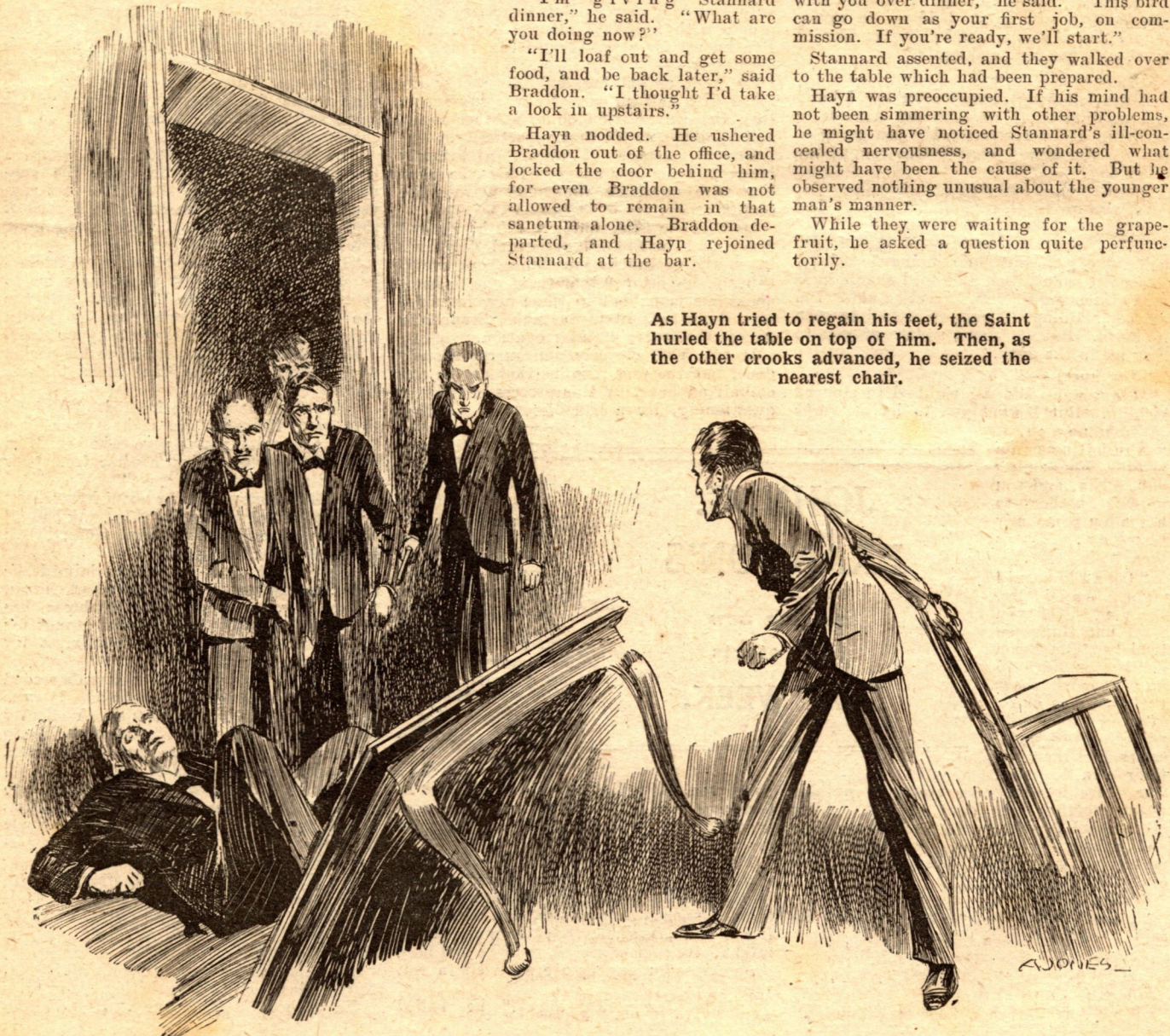
"I meant to come to some arrangement with you over dinner," he said. "This bird can go down as your first job, on commission. If you're ready, we'll start."

Stannard assented, and they walked over to the table which had been prepared.

Hayn was preoccupied. If his mind had not been simmering with other problems, he might have noticed Stannard's ill-concealed nervousness, and wondered what might have been the cause of it. But he observed nothing unusual about the younger man's manner.

While they were waiting for the grapefruit, he asked a question quite perfunctorily.

As Hayn tried to regain his feet, the Saint hurled the table on top of him. Then, as the other crooks advanced, he seized the nearest chair.



A. JONES

"What's this South African's name?"

"Templar—Simon Templar," answered Jerry.

The name meant nothing at all to Mr. Hayn.

THE BOOB.

OVER the dinner, Hayn made his offer—a twenty per cent. commission on business introduced. Stannard hardly hesitated before accepting.

"You don't want to be squeamish about it," Hayn argued. "I know it's against the law, but that's splitting hairs. Horse-racing is just as much a gamble. There'll always be fools who want to get rich without working, and there's no reason why we shouldn't take their money. You won't have to do anything that would make you liable to be sent to prison, though some of my staff would be gaoled if the police caught them. You're quite safe. And the games are perfectly straight. We only win because the law of probabilities favours the bank."

This was not strictly true, for there were other factors to influence the runs of bad luck which attended the players upstairs; but this sordid fact Mr. Hayn did not feel called upon to emphasise.

"Yes—I'll join you," Stannard said. "I've known it was coming. I didn't think you went on giving and lending me money for looking decorative and doing an odd job or two for you now and again."

"My dear fellow—"

"Dear-fellowing doesn't alter it. I know you want more of me than my services in decoying boobs upstairs. Are you going to tell me you didn't know I was caught the other day?"

Hayn stroked his chin.

"I was going to compliment you. How you got rid of that parcel of snow—"

"The point that matters is that I did get rid of it," cut in Stannard briefly. "And if I hadn't been able to, I should have been on remand in Brixton Prison now. I'm not complaining. I suppose I had to earn my keep. But it wasn't square of you to keep me in the dark."

"You knew—"

"I guessed. It's all right—I've stopped kicking. But I want you to let me right in from now on, if you're letting me in at all. I'm joining you, all in, and you needn't bother to humbug me any longer. How's that?"

"That's all right," said Mr. Hayn. "If you must put things so crudely. But you don't even have to be squeamish about the dope side of it. If people choose to make fools of themselves like that, it's their own look-out. Our share is simply to refuse to quibble about whether it's legal or not. After all, alcohol is sold legally in this country, and nobody blames the publican if his customers get drunk every night and eventually die of D.T.s."

Stannard shrugged. "I can't afford to argue, anyhow," he said. "How much do I draw?"

"Twenty per cent.—as I told you."

"What's that likely to make?"

"A lot," said Hayn. "We play higher here than anywhere else in London, and there isn't a great deal of competition in

the snow market. You might easily draw upwards of seventy pounds a week."

"Then will you do something for me, Mr. Hayn? I owe a lot of money outside. I'll take three thousand flat for the first year to pay off everybody and fit myself up with a packet in hand."

"Three thousand pounds is a lot of money," said Hayn judicially. "You owe me nearly a thousand as it is."

"If you don't think I'm going to be worth it—"

Mr. Hayn meditated, but not for long. The making of quick decisions was the whole reason for his success, and he didn't mind how much a thing cost if he knew it was worth it. He had no fear that Stannard would attempt to double-cross him.

Among the other purposes which it served, Danny's formed a working headquarters for the Snake's boys. Stannard could not help knowing the reputation of the gang, and he must know also that they had worked Hayn's vengeance on traitors before. No—there was no chance that Stannard would dare to try a double-cross.

"I'll give you a cheque to-night," said Hayn.

Stannard was effusively grateful.

"You won't lose by it," he promised. "Templar's a speculation, granted. I've only met him once. But there are other people with mints of money—people that I've known for years—that I can vouch for absolutely—"

He went on talking, but Hayn only listened with half an ear. He was anxious to turn the conversation on to another topic, and he did so at the first opportunity.

Under pretence of taking a fatherly interest in his new agent's affairs, he plied him with questions about his private life and interests.

Most of the information which he elicited was stale news to him, for he had long since taken the precaution of finding out everything of importance that there was to know about his man; but in these new inquiries Mr. Hayn contrived to make Stannard's fiancée the centre of interrogation.

It was very cleverly and surreptitiously done, but the fact remains that at the end of half an hour, by this process of indirect questioning, Hayn had discovered all that

he wanted to know about the life and habits of Gwen Chandler.

"Do you think you could get her along here to supper on Thursday?" he suggested. "The only time I've met her, if you remember, I think you rather prejudiced her against me. It's up to you to put that right."

"I'll see what I can do," said Stannard.

After that, his point won, Hayn had no further interest in directing the conversation, and they were chatting desultorily when Simon Templar arrived.

The Saint, after weighing the relative merits of full evening dress or an ordinary lounge suit for the auspicious occasion, had decided upon a compromise, and was sporting a dinner-jacket; but he wore it, as might have been expected, as if he had been an ambassador paying a State visit in full regalia.

"Hallo, Jerry, dear angel!" he bailed Stannard cheerfully.

Then he noticed Mr. Hayn, and turned with outstretched hand.

"And you must be Uncle Ambrose," he greeted that gentleman cordially. "Pleased to meet you. That's right, isn't it, Jerry? This is the uncle who died and left all his money to the cats' home? Sorry to see you looking so well, Uncle Ambrose, old mon—goose!"

Mr. Hayn seemed somewhat taken aback. This man did not wear his clothes in the manner traditionally associated with raw Colonialists with money to burn; and if his speech was typical of that of strong, silent men from the great open spaces of that vintage, Mr. Hayn decided that the culture of Piccadilly must have spread farther abroad into the British Empire than Cecil Rhodes had ever hoped in his wildest dreams.

Mr. Hayn had never heard of Rhodes—to him, Rhodes was an island where they grew red hens—but if he had heard of Rhodes he might reasonably have expressed his surprise like that.

He looked round to Jerry Stannard with raised eyebrows, and Stannard tapped his forehead and lifted his glass significantly.

"So we're going to see a real live gambling hell!" said the Saint, drawing up a chair. "Isn't this fun? Let's all have a lot of drinks on the strength of it!"

He called for liqueurs, and paid for them from a huge wad of banknotes which he tugged from his pocket. Mr. Hayn's eyes lit up at the sight, and he decided that there were excuses for Templar's eccentricity. He leant forward, and set himself out to be charming.

The Saint, however, had other views on the subject of the way in which the conversation should go, and at the first convenient pause he came out with a remark that showed that he had been paying little attention to what had gone before.

"I've bought a book about card tricks," he said. "I thought it might help me to spot sharpers. But the best part of it was the chapter on fortune-telling by cards. Take a card, and I'll tell you all your sins."

He produced a new pack from his pocket and pushed it across the table towards Hayn.

"You first, uncle," he invited. "And see that your thoughts are right when you draw, otherwise you'll give the cards a wrong impression. Hum a verse from your favourite hymn, for instance."

Mr. Hayn knew nothing about hymns, but he complied tolerantly. If this freak had all that money, and perhaps some more, by all means let him be humoured.

"Now, isn't that sweet!" exclaimed the Saint, taking up the card Hayn had chosen. "Jerry, my pet, your Uncle Ambrose has drawn the ace of hearts. That stands for princely generosity. Uncle, you must try your luck again."

Simon Templar pored over Hayn's second card until the drinks arrived. It was noticeable that his shoulders shook silently at one time. Mr. Hayn attributed this to repressed hiccups, and was gravely in error. Presently the Saint looked up.

"Has an aunt on your mother's side," he asked solemnly, "ever suffered from a bilious attack following a meal of sausages made by a German pork butcher with a hammer-toe and three epileptic children?"

Mr. Hayn shook his head, staring.

"I haven't any aunts," he said.

"I'm so sorry," said the Saint, as if he were deeply distressed to hear of Mr. Hayn's plight of pathetic auntlessness. "But it means the beastly book's all wrong. Never mind. Don't let's bother about it."

He pushed the pack away. Undoubtedly he was quite mad.

JOHN G. BRANDON'S

amazing new
story starts

NEXT WEEK.

"Aren't you going to tell us any more?" asked Stannard, with a wink to Hayn.

"Uncle Ambrose would blush if I went on," said Templar. "Look at the brick I've dropped already. But if you insist, I'll try one more card."

Hayn obliged again, smiling politely. He was starting to get acclimatised. Clearly the secret of being on good terms with Mr. Templar was to let him have his own irrepressible way.

"I only hope it isn't the five of diamonds," said the Saint earnestly. "Whenever I do this fortune-telling stuff, I'm terrified of somebody drawing the five of diamonds. You see, I'm bound to tell the truth, and the truth in that case is frightfully hard to tell to a comparative stranger. Because, according to my book, a man who draws the five of diamonds is liable at any moment to send an anonymous donation of ten thousand pounds to the London Hospital. Also, cards are unlucky for him, he is an abominable blackguard, and he has a repulsively ugly face."

Hayn kept his smile nailed in position, and faced his card.

"The five of diamonds, Mr. Templar," he remarked gently.

"No—is it really?" said Simon, in most saintly astonishment. "Well, well, well! There you are, Jerry—I warned you your uncle would be embarrassed if I went on. Now I've dropped another brick. Let's talk of something else, quickly, before he notices. Uncle Ambrose, tell me, have you ever seen a hot dog fighting a cat-o'-nine-tails? No. Well, shuffle the pack, and I'll show you a conjuring trick."

Mr. Hayn shuffled and cut, and the Saint rapidly dealt off five cards, which he passed face downwards across the table.

It was about the first chance Mr. Hayn had had to sidle a word in, and he felt compelled to protest about one thing.

"You seem to be suffering from a delusion, Mr. Templar," he said. "I'm not Jerry's uncle—I'm just a friend of his. My name's Hayn—Edgar Hayn."

"Why?" asked the Saint innocently.

"It happens to be the name I was christened with, Mr. Templar," Hayn replied with some asperity.

"Is—that—so?" drawled the Saint mildly. "Sorry again!"

Hayn frowned. There was something peculiarly infuriating about the Saint in that particular vein—something that, while it rasped the already raw fringes of his temper, was also beginning to send a queer, indefinable uneasiness creeping up his back.

"And I'm sorry if it annoys you," he snapped.

Simon Templar regarded him steadily.

"It annoys me," he said, "because, as I told you, it's my business never to make mistakes, and I just hate being wrong. The records of Somerset House told me that your name was once something quite different—that you weren't christened Edgar Hayn at all. And I believed it."

Hayn said nothing. He sat quite still, with that tingling thrill of apprehension crawling round the base of his scalp. And the Saint's clear blue gaze never left Hayn's face.

"If I was wrong about that," the Saint went on softly, "I may quite easily have been wrong about other things. And that would annoy me more than ever, because I don't like wasting my time. I've spent several days figuring out a way of meeting you for just this little chat—I thought it was about time our relationship became a bit more personal—and it'd break my heart to think it had all been for nothing."



Simon Templar made a hurried search through Hayn's desk, and found the evidence of his guilt.

"Don't tell me that, Edgar, beloved—don't tell me it wasn't any use my finding out that dear little Jerry was a friend of yours—don't tell me that I might have saved myself the trouble I took scraping an acquaintance with the said Jerry just to bring about this informal meeting. Don't tell me that, dear heart!"

Hayn moistened his lips. He was fighting down an insane, unreasoning feeling of panic; and it was the Saint's quiet, level voice and mocking eyes, as much as anything, that held Edgar Hayn rooted in his chair.

"Don't tell me, in fact, that you won't appreciate the little conjuring trick I came here especially to show you," said the Saint, more mildly than ever.

He reached out suddenly and took the cards he had dealt from Hayn's nerveless fingers. Hayn had guessed what they would prove to be, long before Simon, with a flourish, had spread the cards out face upwards on the table.

"Don't tell me you aren't pleased to see our visiting-cards personally presented!" said the Saint, in his very saintliest voice.

His white teeth flashed in a smile, and there was a light of adventurous recklessness dancing in his eyes as he looked at Edgar Hayn across the sign of the Five Kings.

A ROUGH HOUSE.

"AND if I'm talking pure prune juice and boloney," went on the Saint, in that curiously velvety tone which still contrived somehow to prick all over with little warning spikes; "if all that is sheer banana oil and soft roe, I shan't even raise a smile with the story I was going to tell you. It's my very latest one, and it's about a loose-living land-shark called Hayn, who was born in a barn in the rain. What he'd struggled to hide was found out when he died—there was mildew all over his brain. Now, that one's been getting a big hand everywhere I've told it since I made it up, and it'll be one of the bitterest disappointments of my life if it doesn't fetch you, sweetheart!"

Hayn's chair went over with a crash as he kicked to his feet. Strangely enough, now that the murder was out and the first shock absorbed, the weight on his mind

seemed lightened, and he felt better able to cope with the menace.

"So you're the young cub we've been looking for!" he rasped.

The Saint raised his hand.

"Quite," he murmured. "But don't let's get melodramatic about it, son. The last man who got melodramatic with me was hanged at Exeter about six months back. It don't seem to be healthy!"

Hayn looked round. The diners had left, and as yet no one had arrived to take their places; but the clatter of his chair upsetting had roused three startled waiters, who were staring uncertainly in his direction. But a review of these odds did not seem to disturb the Saint, who was lounging languidly back in his seat with his hands in his pockets and a benign expression on his face.

"I suppose you know that the police are after you," grated Hayn.

"I didn't," said the Saint. "That's interesting. Why?"

"You met some men in the Brighton train and played poker with them. You swindled them right and left, and when they accused you, you attacked them and pinched the money. I think that's good enough to put you away for some time."

"And who's going to identify me?"

"The four men."

"You surprise me," drawled Simon. "I seem to remember that on that very day, just outside Brighton racecourse, those same four were concerned in beating up a poor little coot of a lame bookie, named Tommy Mitre, and pinching his money. There didn't happen to be any policemen about—they arranged it quite cleverly—and the crowd that saw it would most likely all be too scared of the Snake to give evidence."

"But yours truly and a couple of souls also saw the fun. We were a long way off, and the Snake and his boys were over the horizon by the time we got to the scene, but we could identify them all, and a few more who weren't there—and we shouldn't be afraid to step into the witness-box and say our piece. No, sonnkins—I don't think the police will be brought into that. That must go down to history as a little private wrangle between Snake and me."

"Send one of your beauty chorus out for a Robert and give me in charge, if you like, but don't blame me if Ganning and the boys come back at you for it. Knowing their reputations, I should say they'd get the 'cat' as well as their six months' hard, and that won't make them love you a lot. Have it your own way, though."

The argument was watertight, and Hayn realised it. He was beginning to cool down. He hadn't a kick—for the moment, the Saint had got him right down in the mud with a foot on his face. But he didn't see what good that was doing the Saint.

It was a big bluff, Hayn was starting to think, and he had sense enough to realise that it wasn't helping him one bit to get all hot under the collar about it.

In fact—such was the exhilarating effect of having at last found an enemy that he could see and hit back at—Hayn was rapidly

reckoning that the Saint might lose a lot by that display of bravado.

Clearly the Saint didn't want the police horning in at all. It didn't even matter that the Saint knew things about Hayn and his activities that would have interested the police. The Saint was on some lay of his own, and the police weren't being invited to interfere. Very well. So be it.

The cue for Hayn was to bide his time and refuse to be rattled. But he wished the Saint hadn't got that mocking, self-possessed air of having a lot more high cards up his sleeves just waiting to be produced. It spoilt Hayn's happiness altogether. The Saint was behaving like a fool; and yet, in some disconcertingly subtle way, he managed to do it with the condescending air of putting off a naturally tremendous gravity in order to amuse the children.

Hayn righted his chair and sat down again slowly. The alert waiters relaxed—they were a tough crowd, and selected more for their qualities of toughness than for their clean finger-nails and skill at juggling with plates and dishes.

But as Hayn sat down his right hand went round behind his chair—his back was towards the group of waiters—and with his fingers he made certain signs. One of the waiters faded away inconspicuously.

"So what do you propose to do?" Hayn said.

"Leave you," answered the Saint benevolently. "I know your ugly dial isn't your fault, but I've seen about as much of it as I can stand for one evening. I've done what I came to do, and now I think you can safely be left to wonder what I'm going to do next. See you later, I expect, my beautiful ones—"

The Saint rose, and walked unhurriedly to the stairs. By that time, there were five men ranged in a row at the foot of the stairs, and they showed no signs of making way for anyone.

"We should hate to lose you so soon, Mr. Templar," said Hayn.

The Saint's lounging steps slowed up, and stopped. His hands slid into his pockets, and he stood for a moment surveying the quintet of waiters with a beatific smile. Then he turned.

"What are these?" he inquired pleasantly. "The guard of honour, or the cabaret beauty chorus?"

"I think you might sit down again, Mr. Templar," suggested Hayn.

"And I think not," said the Saint.

He walked swiftly back to the table—so swiftly and purposefully that Hayn instinctively half-rose from his seat, and the five men started forward. But the Saint did not attack at that moment. He stopped in front of Hayn, his hands in his pockets; and although that maddening little smile still lurked on his lips, there was something rather stern about his pose.

"I said I was going to leave you, and I am," he murmured with a gentleness that was in amazing contrast to the intent tautness of his bearing. "That's what I came here for, ducky—to leave you. This is just meant for a demonstration of all-round superiority. You think you can stop me—but you watch! I'm going to prove to you this evening that nothing on earth can stop me when I get going. Understand, loveliness?"

"We shall see," said Hayn.

The Saint's smile became, if possible, even more saintly. Somehow, that smile, and the air of hair-trigger alertness which accompanied it, was bothering Edgar Hayn a heap. He knew it was all bravado—he knew the Saint had bitten off more than he could chew for once—he knew that the odds

were all against a repetition of the discomfiture of the Ganning combine. And yet he couldn't feel happy about it.

There was a kind of quivering strength about the Saint's lazy bearing—something that reminded Edgar Hayn of wire and whipcord and indiarubber and compressed steel springs and high explosive.

"In the space of a few minutes," said the Saint, "you're going to see a sample of rough-housing that'll make your bunch of third-rate hoodlums look like two cents' worth of oxtail. But before I proceed to beat them up, I want to tell you this—which you can pass on to your friends. Ready?"

Hayn spread out his hands.

"Then I'll shoot," said the Saint. "It's just this. The Five Kings are normally souls of peace and goodwill towards men. But we don't like crooks, blood-suckers, traders in vice and corruption, and other verminous excrescences of that type—such as yourself. We're going to beat you up and do you down, skin you, and smash you, and scare you off the face of Europe. We aren't bothered about the letter of the law, we act exactly as we please, we inflict what punishments we think suitable, and no one is going to escape us.

"Ganning got hurt, but still you don't believe me. You're the next on the list, and by the time I've finished with you, you'll be an example to convince others. And it will go on. That's all I've got to say now, and when I've left you, you can go forth and spread the news. I'm leaving now!"

He stooped suddenly, grasped the leg of Hayn's chair, and tipped it over backwards with one jerking heave. As Hayn tried to scramble to his feet, the Saint put an ungentle foot in his face and upset the table on top of him.

The five tough waiters were pelting across the floor in a pack. Simon reached out for the nearest chair, and sent it skating over the room at the height of six inches from the ground, with a vimful swing of his arms that gave it the impetus of a charging buffalo. It smashed across the leader's knees and shins with a bone-shattering force, and the man went down with a yell.

That left four.

The Saint had another chair in his hands by the time the next man was upon him. The waiter flung up his arms to guard his head, and tried to rush into a grapple; but the Saint stepped back and reversed the swing of his chair abruptly. It swerved under the man's guard and crashed murderously into his short ribs.

Three!

The next man ran slap into a sledgehammer left that hurled him a dozen feet away. The other two hesitated, but the Saint was giving no breathing space. He leapt in at the nearest man with a pile-driving left-right-left tattoo to the solar plexus.

As the tough crumpled up with a choking groan under that battering-ram assault, some sixth sense flashed the Saint a warning.

He leapt to one side, and the chair Hayn had swung to his head swished harmlessly past him, the vigour of the blow toppling Hayn off his balance. The Saint assisted his downfall with an outflung foot which sent the man hurtling headlong.

The last man was still coming on, but warily. He ducked the Saint's lead, and replied with a right swing to the side of the head which gingered the Saint up a peach.

Simon Templar decided that his reputation was involved, and executed a beautiful feint with his left which gave him an opening to lash in a volcanic right squarely upon the gangster's nose.

As the man dropped, the Saint whipped round and caught Stannard.

"Fight you fool!" the Saint hissed in his ear. "This is for local colour!"

Stannard clinched, and then the Saint broke away, and firmly, but regretfully, clipped him on the ear.

It was not one of the Saint's heftiest punches, but it was hard enough to knock the youngster down convincingly; and then the Saint looked round hopefully for something else to wallop, and found nothing.

Hayn was rising again, shakily, and so were those of the five toughs who were in a fit state to do so, but there was no notable enthusiasm to renew the battle.

"Any time any of you bad cheeses want any more lessons in rough-housing," drawled the Saint, a little breathlessly, "you've only got to drop me a postcard, and I'll be right along."

This time there was no attempt to bar his way.

He collected hat, stick, and gloves from the cloak-room, and went through the upstairs lounge. As he reached the door, he met Braddon returning.

"Hallo, sweetness!" said the Saint genially. "Pass right down the car and hear the new joke the boys of the burg downstairs are laughing at!"

Braddon was still trying to guess the cause for and meaning of this extraordinary salutation by a perfect stranger, when the Saint, without any haste or heat, but so swiftly and deftly that the thing was done before Braddon realised what was happening, had reached out and seized the brim of Braddon's hat and forced it well down over his eyes. Then, with a playful tweak of Braddon's nose, and a cheery wave of his hand to the dumbfounded Danny, he departed.

Danny was not a quick mover, and the street outside was Saint-less by the time Braddon had struggled out of his hat and reached the door.

When his vocabulary was exhausted, Braddon went downstairs in search of Hayn, and stopped open-mouthed at the wreckage he saw.

Mr. Hayn, turning from watching the Saint's triumphant vanishment, had swung round savagely on Stannard. The Saint's unscathed exit had left Hayn in the foulest of tempers.

All around him, it seemed, an army of tough waiters in various stages of disrepair, were gathering themselves to their feet with a muttered obligato of lurid language. Well, if there wasn't an army of them, there were five—five bone-hard heavyweights—and that ought to have been enough to settle any ordinary man, even on the most liberal computation of odds. But the Saint had simply waded right through them, hazed and manhandled and roasted them, and walked out without a scratch.

Hayn would have taken a bet that the Saint's tie wasn't even a millimetre out of centre at the end of it. The Saint had made fools of them without turning a hair.

Hayn vented his exasperation on Jerry, and even the fact that he had seen the boy help to tackle the Saint and get the worst of it in their company did not mitigate his wrath.

"You blithering fool!" he blazed. "Couldn't you see he was up to something? Are you taken in by everyone who tells you the tale?"

"I told you I couldn't guarantee him," Stannard protested. "But when I met him, he wasn't a bit like he was to-night. Honestly, Mr. Hayn—how could I have known? I don't even know what he was after yet. Those cards—"

"South African grandmothers!" snarled Hayn.

Braddon intervened.

"Who was this gentleman, anyway?" he demanded.

"Gentleman" was not the word he used.

"Use your eyes, you lunatic!" Hayn flared, pointing to the table, and Braddon's jaw dropped as he saw the cards.

"You've had one of those guys in here?"

"What the deuce d'you think? You probably passed him coming in. And from what the Snake said, and what I've seen myself, he's probably right at the top—he might even be the Joker himself!"

"So that was the gentleman!" said Braddon, only once again he described Simon Templar with a more decorative word.

Hayn snorted.

"And that fool Stannard brought him here," he said.

"I've told you, I didn't know much about him, Mr. Hayn," Stannard expostulated. "I warned you I couldn't answer for him."

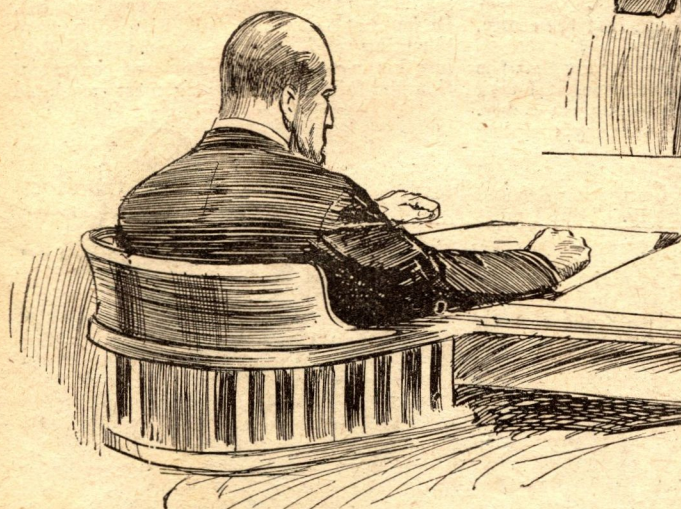
"The kid's right," said Braddon. "If he put it over on the Snake, he might have put it over on anybody."

There was logic in the argument, but it was some time before Hayn could be made to see it. But presently he quieted down.

"We'll have a talk about this, Braddon," he said. "I've got an idea for putting a stop to his funny stuff. He didn't get clean away—I put Keld on to follow him. By tonight we'll know where he lives, and then I don't think he'll last long."

He turned to Jerry. The boy was fidgeting nervously, and Hayn became diplomatic. It wasn't any use rubbing a valuable man up the wrong way.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper, old man," he said. "I can see it wasn't your fault. You just want to be more careful. I ought to have warned you about those Five Kings—they're dangerous. Have a cigar."



It was Mr. Hayn's peace-offering. Stannard accepted it.

"No offence," he said "I'm sorry I let you down."

"We won't say any more about it, old man," said Hayn heartily. "You won't mind if I leave you? Mr. Braddon and I have some business to talk over. I expect you'll amuse yourselves upstairs. But you mustn't play any more, you know."

"I shan't want to," said Stannard. "But, Mr. Hayn—"

Hayn stopped.

"Yes, old man?"

"Would you mind if I asked you for that cheque? I'll give you an I.O.U. now!"

"I'll see that you get it before you leave."

"It's awfully good of you, Mr. Hayn,"

said Stannard apologetically. "Three thousand pounds, it was."

"I hadn't forgotten," said Hayn shortly.

He moved off, cursing the damaged waiters out of his path; and Stannard watched him go thoughtfully. So far, it had all been too easy, but how long was it going to last?

He was watching the early dancers assembling, when a waiter, whose face was obscured by a large piece of sticking-plaster, came through with a sealed envelope. Stannard ripped it open, inspected the cheque it contained, and scribbled his signature to the promissory note that came with it. He sent this back to Hayn by the same waiter.

His abstemiousness that evening was remarkable. He sat with an untasted drink in front of him, while the coloured orchestra broke into its first frenzies of syncopation, and watched the gyrating couples with a jaundiced eye for an hour. Then he drained his glass, rose, and made his way to the stairs.

Through the window of the office, he saw Hayn and Braddon still engaged in earnest

bursting the meter somewhere in the wilds of Edmonton?"

He gave Stannard a cigarette, and received a cheque in return.

"A thousand pounds, as I promised," said Stannard.

The Saint put it carefully away in his wallet.

"And why I should give it to you I don't know," Stannard said.

"It is the beginnings of wisdom," said the Saint. "The two thousand that's left will pay off your debts and give you a fresh start, and I'll get your I.O.U.'s back for you in a day or two. A thousand pounds isn't much to pay for that."

"Except that I might have kept the money and gone on working for Hayn."

"But you have reformed," said the Saint



The Saint bowed deeply before Hayn. "Edgar," he said quietly, "meet the Five Kings."

conversation. He tapped on the pane, and Hayn looked up and nodded. The hidden door swung open as Stannard reached it, and closed after him as he passed through.

He strolled through the gaming-rooms, greeted a few acquaintances, and watched the play for a while without enthusiasm. He left the club as soon as he conveniently could.

The next morning he hired a car and drove rapidly out of London. He met the Saint on the Newmarket road at a prearranged milestone.

"There was a man following me," said the Saint happily. "When I got out of my bus, he took a taxi. I wonder if he gave it up, or if he's still toiling optimistically along

gently. "And I'm sure the demonstration you saw last night will keep you on the straight and narrow path. If you kept in with Hayn, you'd have me to deal with."

He climbed back into his car and pressed the self-starter, but Stannard was still curious.

"What are you going to do with the money?" he asked. "I thought you were against crooks."

"I am," said the Saint virtuously. "It goes to charity, less my ten per cent. commission charged for collecting. You'll hear from me again when I want you. *Au revoir*—or, in the Spanish, *hasta la vista*—or, if you prefer it in the German, *auf Wiedersehen!*"

THE FOUR KINGS.

ABOUT a week after the Saint's mercenary irruption into Danny's, Gwen Chandler met Mr. Edgar Hayn in Regent Street one morning by accident. At exactly the same time, Mr. Edgar Hayn met Gwen Chandler on purpose, for he had been at some pains to bring about that accidental meeting.

"We see far too little of you these days, my dear," he said, taking her hand.

She was looking cool and demure in a summer frock of printed chiffon, and her fair hair peeped out under the brim of her picture hat to set off the cornflower blue of her eyes.

"Why, it seems no time since Jerry and I were having supper with you," she said.

"No time is far too long for me," said Mr. Hayn cleverly. "One could hardly have too much of anyone as charming as yourself, my dear young lady."

At the supper-party, which she had unwillingly been induced to join, he had set himself out to be an irreproachable host, and his suave geniality had gone a long way towards undoing the first instinctive dislike which she had felt for him, but she did not know how to take him in this reversion to his earlier pose of exaggerated heartiness.

It reminded her of the playful romping advances of an elephant, but she did not find it funny.

Mr. Hayn, however, was for the moment as pachydermatous as the animal on whose pleasantries he appeared to have modelled his own, and her slightly chilling embarrassment was lost on him. He waved his umbrella towards the window of the shop outside which they were standing.

"Do you know that name, Miss Chandler?" he asked.

She looked in the direction indicated.

"Laserre? Yes, of course, I've heard of it."

"I am Laserre," said Hayn largely. "This is the opportunity I've been waiting for to introduce you to our humble premises—and how convenient that we should meet on the very doorstep!"

She was not eager to agree, but before she could frame a suitable reply he had propelled her into the glittering red-carpeted room where the preparations of the firm were purveyed in a hushed and reverent atmosphere reminiscent of a cathedral.

A girl assistant came forward, but in a moment she was displaced by Braddon himself—frock-coated, smooth, oleaginous, hands at washing position.

"This is my manager," said Hayn, and the frock-coated man bowed. "Mr. Braddon, be so good as to show Miss Chandler some samples of the best of our products—the very best."

Thereupon, to the girl's bewilderment, were displayed velvet-lined mahogany trays, serried ranks of them, brought from the shelves that surrounded the room and set out with loving care on a counter, one after another, till she felt completely dazed.

There were rows upon rows of flashing crystal bottles of scent, golden cohorts of lipsticks, platoons of little alabaster pots of rouge, orderly regiments of enamelled boxes of powder.

Her brain reeled before the contemplation of such a massed quantity of luxurious panderings to vanity.

"I want you to choose anything you like," said Hayn. "Absolutely anything that takes your fancy, my dear Miss Chandler."

"But—I—I couldn't possibly!" she stammered.

"I insist," he said. "What is the use of being the master of a place like this if you cannot let your friends enjoy it? Surely I can make you such a small present without

any fear of being misunderstood? Accept the trifling gift graciously, my dear young lady. I shall feel most hurt if you refuse."

In spite of the grotesqueness of his approach, the circumstances made it impossible to snub him. But she was unable to fathom his purpose in making her the object of such an outbreak.

It was a hot day, and he was perspiring freely, as a man of his build is unhappily liable to do, and she wondered hysterically if, perhaps, the heat had temporarily unhinged his brain. There was something subtly disquieting about his exuberance.

She modestly chose a small vanity-case and a little flask of perfume, and he seemed disappointed by her reluctance. He pressed other things upon her, and she found herself forced to accept two large boxes of powder.

"Make a nice parcel of those things for Miss Chandler, Mr. Braddon," said Hayn, and the manager carried the goods away to the back of the shop.

"It's really absurdly kind of you, Mr. Hayn," said the girl confusedly. "I don't know what I've done to deserve it."

"Your face is your fortune, my dear young lady," answered Hayn, who was obviously in a brilliant mood.

She had a terrified suspicion that in a moment he would utter an invitation to lunch, and she hastily begged to be excused on the grounds of an entirely fictitious engagement.

"Please don't think me rude, hurrying away like this," she pleaded. "As a matter of fact, I'm already shockingly late."

He was plainly crestfallen.

"No one could help forgiving you anything," he said sententiously. "But the loss to myself is irreparable."

She never knew afterwards how she managed to keep her end up in the exchange of platitudes that followed, until the return of Braddon with a neat package enabled her to make her escape.

Hayn accompanied her out into the street, hat in hand.

"At least," he said, "promise me that the invitation will not be unwelcome, if I ring you up soon and ask you to suggest a day. I could not bear to think that my company was distasteful to you."

"Of course not. I should love to—and thank you ever so much for the powder and things," she said desperately. "But I must fly now."

She fled as best she might.

Hayn watched her out of sight, standing stock-still in the middle of the pavement where she had left him, with a queer gleam in his pale eyes. Then he put on his hat,

and marched off without re-entering the shop.

He made his way to the club in Soho, where he was informed that Snake Ganning and some of the boys were waiting to see him.

Hayn let them wait while he wrote a letter, which was addressed to M. Henri Chastel, Poste Restante, Athens; and he was about to ring for the Snake to be admitted when there was a tap on the door and Danny entered.

"There are five of them," said Danny helpfully.

"Five of whom?" asked Hayn patiently.

"Five," said Danny, "including the man who pulled Mr. Braddon's hat down over his eyes. They said they must see you at once."

Mr. Hayn felt in the pit of his stomach the dull sinking qualm which had come to be inseparable from the memory of the Five Kings and of the electric personality of the Joker himself.

Every morning without fail since the first warning he had received, there had been the now familiar envelope beside his plate at breakfast, containing the inevitable five cards; and every afternoon, when he reached Danny's, he found a similar reminder among the letters on his desk.

He had not had a chance to forget the Five, even if he wished to do so; as a matter of fact, the Snake and his boys were at that moment waiting to receive their instructions in connection with a plot which Hayn had formed for disposing of the menace.

But their policy was rapidly wearing out his nerves. Knowing what they did, they could only be refraining from passing their knowledge along to Scotland Yard because they hoped to gain more by silence, yet there had been no attempt at blackmail—only those daily melodramatic reminders of their continued interest.

Hayn was starting to feel like a mouse that was being tormented to the verge of madness by an exceptionally sportive cat. He had not a doubt that the Five Kings were scheming and working against him still, but his most frenzied efforts of concentration had failed to deduce the most emaciated



shred of an idea of the direction from which the next assault would be launched, and seven days and nights of baffled inaction had brought Edgar Hayn to the borders of a breakdown.

Now the Joker—and the Four Kings also, from all appearances—were paying a second visit. The net round was about to begin, and Hayn was fighting in a profounder obscurity than ever.

"Show them in," he said in a voice that he hardly recognised as his own.

He bent over some writing, struggling to control his nerves for the bluff that was all he had to rely on, and with an effort of will he succeeded in not looking up when he heard the door opening and the soft footsteps of men filing into the room.

"Walk right in, souls," said the Saint's unmistakable cheery accents. "That's right—park yourselves along that wall in single rank and stand easy."

Then Hayn raised his eyes, and saw the

Saint standing over the desk regarding him affectionately.

"Good-morning, Edgar," said the Saint affably. "How do?"

"Good-morning, Mr. Templar," said Hayn.

He shifted his gaze to the four men ranged beside the door. They were a nondescript quartet, in his opinion—not at all the sort of men he had pictured in his hazy attempts to visualise Templar's partners.

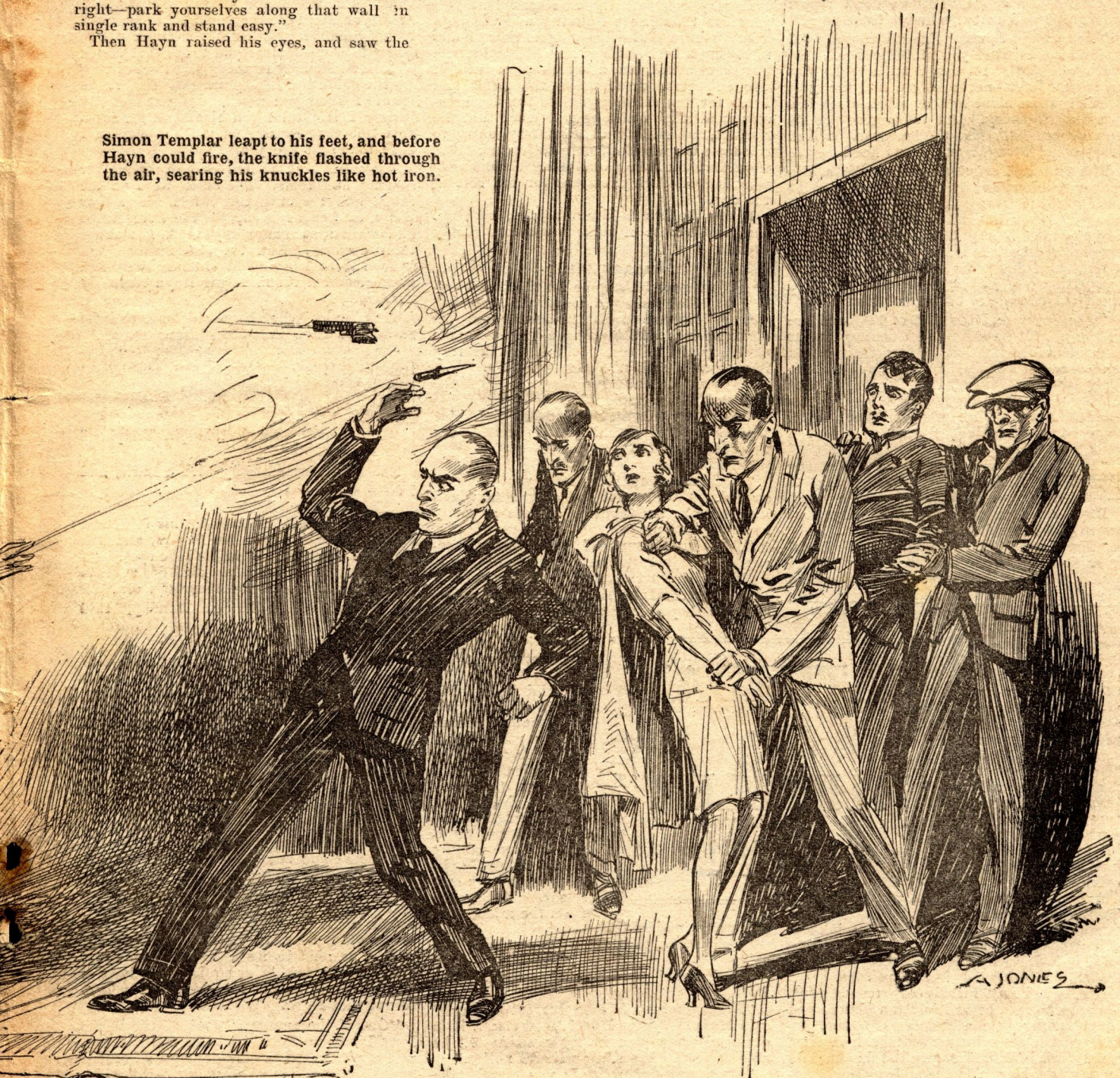
Only one of them could have been under thirty, and the clothes of all of them had seen better days.

"These are the rest of the gang," said the Saint. "I noticed that I was followed home from here last time I called, so I thought it'd save you a lot of sleuthing if I brought the other lads right along and introduced them."

He turned.

"Squad—shun! Souls, this is dear Edgar, whom you've heard so much about. As I call your names, reading from left to right, you will each take one pace smartly to your front, bow snappily from the hips, keeping the eyebrows level and the thumb in line with the seam of the trousers, and fall in again. First, Edgar, meet the King of Spades—Mr. Winston Churchill. Make your bow, Winny. On his left, the King of Hearts—Mr. George Robey. Eyebrows level, George. Next, the King of Diamonds—Mr. Herbert Hoover, President of the United States, and no relation to the vacuum cleaner. Wave your handkerchief to the pretty gentleman, Herb! Last, but not least, the King of Clubs—Mr. Gene Tunney. Chest well out, Gene—there are no photographers here. That's the lot, Edgar, except for myself, the Joker. Meet the Saint!"

Simon Templar leapt to his feet, and before Hayn could fire, the knife flashed through the air, searing his knuckles like hot iron.



Hayn nodded.

"That's very considerate of you, Mr. Templar," he said, and his voice was a little shaky, for an idea was being born inside him. "Is that all you came to do?"

"Not quite, Angel Face," said the Saint, settling down on the edge of the desk. "I came to talk business."

"Then you won't want to be hurried," said Hayn. "There are some other people waiting to see me. Will you excuse me while I go and tell them to call again later?"

The Saint smiled.

"By all manner of means, sonny," he said. "But I warn you it won't be any use telling the Snake and his boys to be ready to beat us up when we leave here, because a friend of ours is waiting a block away with a letter to our friend, Inspector Teal—and that letter will be delivered if we don't report safe and sound in ten minutes from now!"

"You needn't worry," said Hayn. "I haven't underrated your intelligence."

He went out. It was a mistake he was to regret later—never before had he left even his allies alone in that office, much less a confessed enemy. But the urgency of his inspiration had, for the moment, driven every other thought out of his head.

The cleverest criminal must make a slip sooner or later, and it usually proves to be such a childish one that the onlooker is amazed that it should have been made at all. Hayn made his slip then, but it must be remembered that he was a very rattled man.

He found Snake Ganning sitting at the bar with three picked boys, and beckoned them out of earshot of the bar-tender.

"The Joker and the rest of his band are in the office," he said, and Ganning let out a virulent exclamation. "No; there won't be any rough business now. I want to have a chance to find out what his game is. But when the other four go, I want you to tail them and find out all you can about them. Report here at midnight, and I'll give you your instructions about Templar himself."

"When I get hold of that devil," Ganning ground out vitriolically, "he's going to —"

Hayn cut him short with an impatient sweep of his hand.

"You'll wait till I've finished with him," he said. "You don't want to charge in like a bull at a gate, before you know what's on the other side of the gate. I'll tell you when to start—you can bet your life on that!"

And in that short space of time the Saint, having shamelessly seized the opportunity provided by Hayn's absence, had comprehensively ransacked the desk. There were four or five IOU's with Stannard's signature in an unlocked drawer, and these he pocketed. Hayn had been incredibly careless.

And then the Saint's eye was caught by an envelope on which the ink was still damp. The name "Chastel" stood out as if it had been spelt in letters of fire, so that Simon stiffened like a pointer.

His immobility lasted only an instant. Then, in a flash, he had folded a blank sheet of notepaper into a blank envelope, together with something which he took from his pocket. With the original before him for a guide, he copied the address in a staggeringly lifelike imitation of Hayn's handwriting.

"I shall now be able to give you an hour, if you want it," said Hayn, returning, and the Saint turned with a bland smile.

"I shan't take nearly as long as that, my cabbage," he replied. "But I don't think the proceedings will interest the others, and they've got work to do. Now you've met them, do you mind if I dismiss the parade?"

"Not at all, Mr. Templar."

There was a glitter of satisfaction in Hayn's eyes; but if the Saint noticed it, he gave no sign.

"Move to the right in column o' route, etcetera," he ordered briskly. "In English, hop it!"

The parade, after a second's indecision, shuffled out with expressionless faces. They had not spoken a word from the time of their entrance to the time of their exit.

It may conveniently be recorded at this juncture that Snake Ganning and the boys spent eleven laboriously profitless hours following a kerb-stone vendor of bootlaces, a pavement artist, and a barrel-organ team of two ex-Service men, whom the Saint had hired for ten shillings apiece for the occasion; and it may also be mentioned that the quartet, assembling at a near-by dairy to celebrate the windfall, were no less mystified than were the four painstaking bloodhounds who dogged their footsteps for the rest of the day.

It was the Saint's idea of a joke; but then, the Saint's sense of humour was remarkably broad.

BLACKMAIL ?

"AND NOW let's come to the horses—as the bishop said to the actress," murmured Simon, fishing out his cigarette-case and tapping a gasper on his thumb-nail. "I came to ask you a very important question."

Hayn sat down.

"Well, Mr. Templar?"

"What would you say," asked the Saint tentatively, "if I told you I wanted ten thousand pounds?"

Hayn smiled.

"I should sympathise with you," he answered. "You're not the only man who'd like to make ten thousand pounds as easily as that."

"But just suppose," said Simon persuasively, "just suppose I told you that if I didn't get ten thousand pounds at once, a little dossier about you would travel right along to Inspector Teal to tell him the story

of the upstairs rooms here and the inner secrets of the Maison Laserre? I could tell him enough to send you to penal servitude for five years."

Hayn's eye fell on the calendar that hung on the wall, with a sliding red ring round the date. His brain was working very rapidly then. Suddenly, he felt unwontedly confident. He looked from the calendar to

his watch, and smiled.

"I should write you a cheque at once," he said.

"And would your current account stand it?"

"All my money is in a current account," said Hayn. "As you will understand, it is essential for a man in my position to be able to realise his estate without notice."

"Then please write," murmured the Saint.

Without a word, Hayn opened a drawer,

took out his cheque-book, and wrote. He passed the cheque to Templar, and the Saint's eyes danced as he read it.

"You're a good little boy, son," said the Saint. "I'm so glad we haven't had any sordid argument and haggling about this. It makes the whole thing so crude, I always think."

Hayn shrugged.

"You have your methods," he said. "I have mine. I ask you to observe the date." He pointed to the calendar. "I ask you to observe the time." He showed his watch, tapping the dial with a stubby forefinger. "Half-past twelve of a Saturday afternoon. You cannot cash that cheque until ten o'clock on Monday morning. Who knows what may have happened by then? I say you will never pay that cheque into your bank. I'm not afraid to tell you that. I know you won't set the police on to me until Monday morning, because you think you're going to win—because you think that at ten o'clock on Monday morning you'll be sitting on the bank's doorstep waiting for it to open. I know you won't. Do you honestly believe I would let you blackmail me for a sum like that—nearly as much money as I have saved in five years?"

The crisis that he had been expecting for so long had come. The cards were on the table, and the only thing left for Edgar Hayn to wonder was why the Five Kings had waited so many days before making their demand. Now the storm which had seemed to be hanging fire interminably had broken, and it found Edgar Hayn curiously unmoved.

Templar looked at Hayn sidelong, and the Saint also knew that the gloves were off.

"You're an odd cove," he said. "Your trouble is that you're too serious. You'll lose this fight because you've no sense of humour—like all second-rate crooks. You can't laugh."

"I may enjoy the last laugh, Templar," said Hayn.

The Saint turned away with a smile, and picked up his hat.

"You kid yourself," he said gently. "You won't, dear one." He took up his stick and swung it delicately in his fingers, and the light of battle glinted in his blue eyes. "I presume I may send your kind donation to the London Hospital anonymously, son."

"We will decide that on Monday," said Hayn.

The Saint nodded.

"I wonder if you know what my game is?" he said soberly. "Perhaps you think I'm a kind of hijacker—a crook picking crooks' pockets? Bad guess, dearie. I'm losing money over this. But I'm just a born-an-bred fighting machine, and a quiet life on the moss-gathering lay is plain Hades for this child."

"I'm not a dick, because I can't be bothered with red tape, but I'm on the same side. I'm out to see that unpleasant insects like you are stamped on, which I grant you the dicks could do; but to justify my existence I'm going to see that the said insects contribute a large share of their ill-gotten gains to charity, which you've got to grant me the dicks can't do. It's always seemed a bit tough to me that microbes of your breed should be able to make a pile swindling, and then be free to enjoy it after they've done a month or two in stir—and I'm here to put that right."

"Out of the money I lifted off the Snake I paid Tommy Mitre back his rightful property, plus a bonus for damages; but the Snake's a small bug, anyway. You're big, and I'm going to see that your contribution is in proportion."

"We shall see," said Hayn.

The Saint looked at him steadily.

"On Monday night you will sleep at Marlborough Street Police Station," he said dispassionately.

The next moment he was gone. Simon Templar had a knack of making his abrupt exits so smoothly that it was generally some minutes before the other party fully realised that he was no longer with them.

Hayn sat looking at the closed door without moving. Then he glanced down, and saw the envelope that lay on the blotter before him, addressed in his own hand to M. Henri Chastel.

And Hayn sat fascinated, staring, for, although the imitation of his hand might have deceived a dozen people who knew it, he looked at it for just long enough to see that it was not the envelope he had addressed.

It was some time before he came out of his trance, and forced himself to slit open the envelope with fingers that trembled.

He spread out the blank sheet of paper, and the five cards that came out with it, on the desk in front of him, and his brain went numb. As a man might have grasped a concrete fact through a murky haze of dope, Hayn realised that his back was to the last wall.

Underneath the superficial veneer of flippancy, the Saint had shown for a few seconds the seriousness of his real quality and the intentness of his purpose, and Hayn had been allowed to appreciate the true mettle of the man who was fighting him.

He could remember the Saint's last words. "On Monday night you will sleep at Marlborough Street Police Station." He could hear the Saint saying it. The voice, had been the voice of a judge pronouncing sentence, and the memory of it made Edgar Hayn's face go grey with fear.

THE PRISONER.

THE SAINT read Edgar Hayn's letter in the cocktail bar of the Piccadilly, over a timely Martini, but his glass stood for a long while untasted before him, for he had not to read far before he learned that Edgar Hayn was bigger game than the Five Kings had ever dreamed.

Then he smoked two cigarettes, very thoughtfully, and made certain plans with a meticulous attention to detail.

In half an hour he had formulated his strategy, but he spent another quarter of an hour and another cigarette going over it again and again in search of anything that he might have overlooked.

He did not touch his drink until he had decided that his plans were as fool-proof as he could make them at such short notice.

The first move took him to the Piccadilly

Post Office, where he wrote out and dispatched a lengthy telegram in code, to the King of Spades, who was Mr. Norman Kent, at that time in Athens on the business of the Five Kings, as has been related; and the Saint thanked his little gods of chance for the happy coincidence that had given him an agent on the spot. It augured well for the future.

Next he shifted across from the counter

As she opened the door, two broad-shouldered men thrust themselves forward. "I'm Inspector Harding, of Scotland Yard," one of them announced.



to a telephone-box, and called a number. For ten minutes he spoke earnestly to the King of Clubs, who was Mr. Leonard Crockford, and gave minute directions. He had these orders repeated over to him to make sure that they were perfectly memorised and understood, and presently he was satisfied.

"Hayn will have found out by now that I know about his connection with Chastel," he concluded, "that is, unless he's posted that letter without looking at it. We've got to act on the assumption that he has found out, and therefore the rule about having nothing to do with me except through the safest of safe channels is doubly in force. I estimate that within the next forty-four hours a number of very strenuous efforts will be made to bump me off, and it won't be any good shutting your eyes to it. It won't be dear Edgar's fault if I haven't qualified for Kensal Green by Monday morning."

Crockford protested, but the Saint dealt shortly with that.

"You're a heap more useful to me working unknown," he said. "I can't help it if your natural vanity makes you kick at having to hide your light under a bushel. There's only need for one of us to prance about in the line of fire, and since they know me all round and upside down as it is I've bagged the job. You don't have to worry. I've never played the corpse yet, and I don't feel like starting now!"

He was in the highest of spirits. The imminent prospect of violent and decisive action always got him that way. It made his blood tingle thrillingly through his veins, and set his eyes dancing recklessly, and made him bless the perfect training in which he had always kept his nerves and sinews.

The fact that his life would be charged a five hundred per cent. premium by any cautious insurance company failed to disturb

his cheerfulness one iota. The Saint was made that way.

The "needle" was a sensation that had never troubled his young life. For the next few hours there was nothing that he could do in the cause of the Five Kings, and he, therefore, proposed to enjoy those hours on his own to the best of his ability.

He was completely unperturbed by the thought of the hectic and perilous hours which were to follow the interlude of enjoyment—rather, the interlude gathered an added zest from the approach of zero hour.

He could not, of course, be sure that Hayn had discovered the abstraction of the letter; but that remained a distinct probability in spite of the Saint's excellent experiment in forgery.

And even without that discovery, the cheque he had obtained, and Hayn's confidence in giving it, argued that there were going to be some very tense moments before the Monday morning.

Simon Templar's guiding principle, which had brought him miraculously unscathed through innumerable desperate adventures in the past, was to assume the worst and take no chances; and in this instance subsequent events were to prove that pessimistic principle the greatest and most triumphant motto that had ever been invented.

The Saint lunched at his leisure, and then relaxed amusingly in a convenient cinema until half-past six. Then he returned home to dress; and was somewhat disappointed to find no reply to his cable waiting for him at his flat.

He dined and spent the night dancing at the Kit-Cat with the lovely and utterly delightful Patricia Holm, for the Saint was as human as the next man, if not more so, and Patricia Holm was his weakness then.

It was a warm evening, and they walked up Regent Street together enjoying the fresh air. They were in Hanover Square, just by the corner of Brook Street, when the Saint saw the first thundercloud, and unceremoniously caught Patricia Holm by the shoulders and jerked her back round the corner and out of sight.

An opportune taxi came prowling by at that moment, and the Saint had hailed it and bundled the girl in before she could say a word.

"I'm telling him to take you to the Savoy," he said. "You'll book a room there, and you'll stay there without putting even the tip of your pretty nose outside the door until I come and fetch you. You can assume that any message or messenger you receive is a fake. I don't think they saw you, but I'm not risking anything. Refuse to pay any attention to anything or anybody but myself in person. I'll be round Monday lunch-time, and if I'm not you can get hold of Inspector Teal and the lads and start raising Cain—but not before!"

The girl frowned suspiciously. "Saint," she said, in the dangerous tone that he knew and loved, "you're trying to elbow me out again!"

"Old darling," said the Saint quietly. "I've stopped trying to elbow you out and make you live a safe, respectable life. I know it can't be done. You can come in on any game I take up, and I don't care if we have to fight the whole massed gangs of bad hats in New York, Chicago, Paris, Berlin, and London. But there's just one kind of dirty work I'm not going to have you mixed up in, and this is it. Get me, old Pat? Then so long!"

He closed the door of the taxi, directed the driver, and watched it drive away. The Saint felt particularly anxious to keep on living at that moment. And then the taxi's tail-light vanished round a corner, and

Patricia Holm went with it; and the Saint turned with a sigh and an involuntary squaring of his shoulders, and swung into Brook Street.

He had observed the speedy-looking closed car that stood by the kerb directly outside the entrance to his flat, and he had seen the four men who stood in a little group on the pavement beside it conversing with all apparent innocence, and he had guessed the worst.

The sum total of those deceptively innocuous fixtures and fittings seemed to him to bear the unmistakable hall-mark of the Hayn confederacy; for the Saint had what he called a nasty suspicious mind.

He strolled on at a leisurely pace. His left hand, in his trouser pocket, was sorting out the key of his front door; in his right hand he twirled the stick that in those days he never travelled without. His black felt hat was tilted over to the back of his head.

In everything outward and visible he wore the mildest and most saintly air of fashionable and elegant harmlessness, for the Saint was never so cool as when everything about him was flaming with red danger-signals.

And as he drew near the little group he noticed that they fell suddenly silent, all turning in his direction.

The Saint was humming a little tune. It all looked too easy—nothing but a welcome and entertaining limbering-up for the big stuff that was to follow. He had slipped the front-door key off the ring and transferred it to a side pocket of his jacket, where it would be more easily found in a hurry.

"Excuse me," said the tallest of the four, taking a step forward to meet him.

"I'm afraid I can't excuse you, Snake," said the Saint regretfully, and swayed back from his toes as Ganning struck at him with a loaded cane.

The Saint felt the wind of the blow caress his face, and then a lightning left uppercut came rocketing up from his knees to impact on the point of the Snake's jaw, and Ganning was catapulted back into the arms of his attendant boys.

Before any of them could recover from their surprise, Templar had leapt lightly up the steps to the portico, and had slipped the key into the lock. But as he turned and withdrew it, the other three came after him, leaving their chief to roll away into the gutter, and the Saint wheeled round to face them with the door swinging open behind him.

He held his stick in both hands, gave it a half-turn, and pulled. Part of the stick stripped away, and in the Saint's right hand a long, slim blade of steel glinted in the dim light. His first thrust took the leading boy through the shoulder, and the other two checked.

The Saint's white teeth flashed in an unpleasant smile.

"You're three very naughty children," said the Saint, "and I'm afraid I shall have to report you to your Sunday-school teacher. Go a long way away, and don't come near me again for years and years!"

The rapier in his hand gleamed and whistled, and the two boys recoiled with gasps of agony as the supple blade lashed across their faces. And then, as they sprang blindly to attack, the Saint streaked through the door and slammed it on them.

He turned the sword back into a stick, and went unhurriedly up the stairs to his flat, which was on the first floor.

Looking down from the window, he saw the four men gathered together engaged in furious deliberation. One of them was mopping about inside his coat with an insanitary handkerchief, and the Snake himself was sagging weakly back against the side of the car holding his jaw.

There were frequent gesticulations in the direction of the Saint's windows. After a time, the four men climbed into the car and drove away.

The brief affray had left the Saint completely unruffled. If you had taken his pulse then, you would have found it ticking over at not one beat above or below its normal 75. He sauntered across the room, switched on the lights, and put away his hat and stick, still humming gently to himself.

Propped up on the table, in a prominent position, was a cable envelope. Without any hurry, the Saint poured himself out a modest whisky, lighted a cigarette, and then fetched a small black notebook from its hiding-place behind a picture.

Provided with these essentials, the Saint settled down on the edge of the table, ripped up the envelope, and extracted the flimsy.

"Elephant revoke," the message began. A little further on was the name "Chandler." And near the end of the closely-written sheet were the words: "Caterpillar diamonds ten spades four chicane hearts knave overcall."

"Elephant" was the code word for Hayn; Chastel was "Caterpillar." "Revoke" meant "has changed his mind." And the Saint could almost decode the sentence which included the words "chicane" and "overcall" at sight.

In his little black book, against the names of every card in the pack, and every bridge and poker term, were short sentences broadly applicable to almost any purpose about which the Five Kings might wish to communicate; and with the aid of this book, and a pencil, the Saint translated the message and wrote the interpretation between the lines.

The information thus gleaned was in confirmation of what he had already deduced since purloining and reading Hayn's letter to Chastel, and the Saint was satisfied.

He opened his portable typewriter, and wrote a letter. It was the first official communiqué from the Five Kings.

"To Chief-Inspector Teal,

"Criminal Investigation Department,

"New Scotland Yard, S.W.1.

"Sir,—I recommend to your notice Edgar Hayn, formerly Heine, 27, Portugal Mansions, Hampstead. He is the man behind Danny's Club in Soho, and a well-timed raid on that establishment, with particular attention to a secret door in the panelling on the ground floor lounge (which is opened by an electric control in Hayn's office in the basement) will give you an interesting insight into the methods of card-sharpping de luxe.

"More important than this, Hayn is also the man behind Laserre, the Regent Street perfumiers, the difference being that George Edward Braddon, the manager, is not a figurehead, but an active partner. A careful watch kept on future consignments received from the Continent by Laserre will provide adequate proof that the main reason for the existence of Laserre is cocaine.

"The drug is smuggled into England in cases of beauty preparations shipped by Hayn's foreign agents and quite openly declared—as dutiable products, that is. In every case will be found a number of boxes purporting to contain face powder, but actually containing cocaine.

"Hayn's European agent is a French national of Levantine extraction, named Henri Chastel. The enclosed letter, in Hayn's own hand, will be sufficient to prove that Hayn and Chastel were up to their necks in the whole European dope traffic.

"Chastel, who is at present in Athens, will be dealt with by my agent there. I regret that I cannot hand him over to the regular

processes of justice; but the present situation with regard to extradition between England and Greece would, I fear, defeat your efforts.

"By the time you receive this, I shall have obtained from Hayn the donation to charity which it is my intention to exact before passing him on to you for punishment, and you may at once take steps to secure his arrest. He has a private Moth aeroplane at Stag Lane Aerodrome, Edgware, which has for some time been kept in readiness against the necessity for either himself or one of his valued agents to make a hasty getaway. A watch kept on the aerodrome, therefore, should ensure the frustration of this scheme.

"In the future, you may expect to hear from me at frequent intervals.

"Assuring you of my best services at all times,

"I remain, etc.,

"pp. The Five Kings,

"THE JOKER."

With this epistle, besides Hayn's letter, Templar enclosed five cards. So that there should be no possibility of tracing him by them, he had had them specially obtained by Stannard from the gaming rooms at Danny's for the purpose.

He addressed the letter, and, after a preliminary survey of the street to make sure that the Snake had not returned or sent deputies, he walked to a near-by pillar-box and posted it. It would not be delivered until Monday morning, and the Saint reckoned that that would give him all the time he needed.

Back in his flat, the Saint called up the King of Hearts, who was one Dicky Tremayne, and gave him instructions concerning the protection of Gwen Chandler. Finally, he telephoned another number and called Jerry Stannard out of bed to receive orders.

At last he was satisfied that everything had been done that he had to do.

He went to the window, drew the curtains aside a cautious half-inch, and looked down again. A little further up Brook Street, on the other side of the road, a blue Furillae sports saloon had drawn up by the kerb. The Saint smiled approvingly.

He turned out the lights in the sitting-room, went through to his bed-room, and began to undress. When he rolled up his left sleeve, there was visible a little leather sheath strapped to his forearm, and in this sheath he carried a beautifully-balanced knife—a mere six inches of razor-keen, leaf-shaped blade and three inches of carved ivory hilt. This was Anna, the Saint's favourite throwing-knife.

The Saint could impale a flying champagne-cork with Anna at twenty paces. He considered her present place of concealment a shade too risky, and transferred the sheath to the calf of his right leg. Finally, he made sure that his cigarette-case contained a supply of a peculiar kind of cigarette.

Outside, in the street, an ordinary bulb motor-horn hooted with a peculiar rhythm. It was a pre-arranged signal, and the Saint did not have to look out again to know that Ganning had returned. And then, almost immediately, a bell rang, and the indicator in the kitchen showed him that it was the bell from the front door.

"They must think I'm a mug!" murmured Simon.

But he was wrong—he had forgotten the fire-escape across the landing outside the door of his flat.

A moment later he heard, down the tiny hall, a dull crash and a sound of splintering wood. It connected up in his mind with the ringing of the front-door bell, and he

realised that the Five Kings had no monopoly of prearranged signals.

That ringing had been to tell the men who had entered at the back that their companions were ready at the front of the building. The Saint acknowledged that he had been trapped into under-rating the organising ability of Edgar Hayn.

Unthinkingly, he had left his automatic in his bed-room. He went quickly out of the kitchen into the hall, and at the sound of his coming the men who had entered with the aid of a jemmy swung round. Hayn was one of them, and his pistol carried a silencer.

"Well, well, well!" drawled the Saint, whose mildness in times of crisis was phenomenal, and prudently raised his hands high above his head.

"You are going on a journey with me, Templar," said Hayn. "We are leaving at once, and I can give no date for your return. Kindly turn round and put your hands behind you."

Templar obeyed. His wrists were bound, and the knots tightened up by ungentle hands.

"Are you still optimistic, Joker?" Hayn taunted him, testing the bonds.

"More than ever," answered the Saint cheerfully. "This is my idea of a night out—as the bishop said—"

Then they turned him round again.

"Take him downstairs," said Hayn.

They went down in a silent procession, the Saint walking without resistance between two men. The front door was opened, and a husky voice outside muttered: "All clear. The flattie passed ten minutes ago, and his beat takes him half an hour."

The Saint was passed on to the men outside and hustled across the pavement into the waiting car. Hayn and two other men followed him in; a third climbed up beside the driver. They moved off at once, heading west.

At the same time, a man rose from his cramped position on the floor of the Furillac that waited twenty yards away. He had been crouched down there for three-quarters of an hour, without a word of complaint for his discomfort, to make it appear that the car was empty and the owner inside the house opposite which the car stood.

From the window, the Saint saw his attackers gathered round the car; one of them sagged weakly in his companion's arms.



The self-starter whirled under his foot as he sidled round behind the wheel, and the powerful engine woke to a throaty whisper.

The car in which the Saint rode with Hayn flashed up the street, gathering speed rapidly; and as it went by, the blue sports Furillac pulled out from the kerb and purred westward at a discreet distance in its wake.

Leonard Crockford, the King of Clubs, drove. The set of his coat was spoiled by the solid bulge of the automatic in one pocket, and there was a stern set to his face which would have amazed those who only knew that amiable young man in his more flippant moods.

From his place in the leading car, Simon Templar caught in the driving mirror a glimpse of the following Furillac, and smiled deep within himself.

THE RAID.

GWEN CHANDLER lived in a microscopic flat in Bayswater, the rent of which was paid by the money left her by her father. She did the housekeeping herself, and, with this saving on a servant, there was enough left over from her income to feed her and give her a reasonably good time. None of the few relatives she knew had ever paid much attention to her.

She should have been happy with her friends, and she had been, but all that had stopped abruptly when she had met and fallen head over heels in love with Jerry Stannard.

He was about twenty-three. She knew that for the past two years he had been leading a reckless life, spending most of his time and money in night clubs and usually going to bed at dawn.

She also knew that his extravagant tastes had plunged him into debt, and that since the death of his father he had been accumulating bigger and bigger creditors; and she attributed these excesses to his friends, for the few people of his acquaintance she had met were of a type she detested. But her advice and inquiries had been answered with such a surliness, that at last she had given up the contest and nursed her anxiety alone.

But a few days ago her fiancé's grumpiness had strangely vanished. Though he still seemed to keep the same Bohemian hours, he had been smiling and cheerful whenever she met him; and once, in a burst of good spirits, he had told her that his debts were paid off and he was making a fresh start.

She could get no more out of him than this, however—her eager questions had made him abruptly taciturn, though his refusal to be cross-examined had been kindly enough.

He would be able to tell her all about it one day, he said, and that day would not be long coming.

She knew that it was his practice to lie in bed late on Sunday mornings; but then, it was his practice to lie in bed late on all the other six mornings of the week.

On this particular Sunday morning, therefore, when a ring on the front door bell had disturbed her from the task of preparing breakfast, she was surprised to find that he was her visitor.

He was trying to hide agitation, but she

discerned that the agitation was not of the harassed kind.

"Got any breakfast for me?" he asked. "I had to come along at this unearthly hour, because I don't know that I'll have another chance to see you all day. Make it snappy, because I've got an important appointment."

"It'll be ready in a minute," she told him.

He loafed about the kitchen, whistling, while she fried eggs and bacon, and sniffed the fragrant aroma appreciatively.

"It smells good," he said. "And I've got the appetite of a lifetime."

She would have expected him to breakfast in a somewhat headachy silence; but he talked cheerfully.

"It must be years since you had a decent holiday," he said. "I think you deserve one, Gwen. What do you say if we get married by special licence and run over to Deauville next week?"

He laughed at her bewildered protests.

"I can afford it," he assured her. "I've paid off everyone I owe money to, and in a fortnight I'm going into a terribly sober job, starting at five pounds a week."

"How did you get it?"

"A man called Simon Templar found it for me. Have you ever met him, by any chance?"

She shook her head, trying to find her voice.

"I'd do anything in the world for that man," said Jerry.

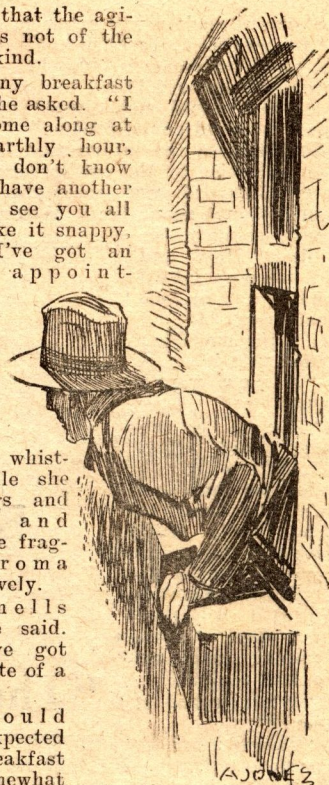
"Tell me about it," she stammered.

He told her—of his miraculous rescue by the Saint and the interview that followed it, of the Saint's persuasiveness, of the compact they had made. He also told her about Hayn; but although the recital was fairly inclusive, it did not include the machinations of the Maison Laserre. The Saint never believed in telling anybody everything, and even Hayn had secrets of his own.

The girl was amazed and shocked by the story, and the revelation of what Stannard's life had been, and might still have been. But all other emotions were rapidly submerged in the great wave of relief which swept over her when she learned that Stannard had given his word to break away, and was even then working on the side of the man who had brought him back to a sense of honour—even if that honour worked in an illegal method.

"I suppose it's crooked, in one way," Stannard admitted. "They're out to get Hayn and his crowd into prison, but first they're swindling them on behalf of charity. I don't know how they propose to do it. On the other hand, though, the money they've got back for me from Hayn is no more than I lost in cash at his beastly club."

"But why did Hayn let you keep on when he knew you'd got no money left?"



Stannard made a wry grimace.

"He wanted to be able to force me into his gang. I came in, too—but that was because Templar told me to agree to anything that would make Hayn pay me that three thousand pound cheque."

She digested the information in a daze. The revelation of the enterprise in which Jerry Stannard was accomplice to the Saint did not shock her. Womanlike, she could see only the guilt of Hayn and the undoubted justice of his punishment. Only one thing made her afraid.

"If you were caught—"

"There'll be no fuss," said Jerry. "Templar's promised me that, and he's the kind of man you'd trust with anything. I haven't had to do anything criminal. And it'll all be over in a day or two. Templar rang me up last night."

"What was it about?"

"That's what he wouldn't tell me. He told me to go to the Splendide at eleven and wait there for a man called Tremayne, who may arrive any time up to one o'clock, and he'll tell me the rest. Tremayne's one of Templar's gang."

Then she remembered Hayn's peculiar behaviour of the previous morning. The parcel she had brought away from Laserre still lay unopened on her dressing-table.

Jerry was interested in the account. Hayn's association with Laserre, as has been mentioned, was news to him. But he could make nothing of the story.

"I expect he's got some foolish crash on you," he suggested. "It's only the way you'd expect a man like that to behave. I'll speak to Templar about it when I see him."

He left the dining-room as soon as he had finished breakfast, and was back in a moment with his hat.

"I must be going now," he said, and took her in his arms. "Gwen, dear, with any luck it'll all be over very soon, and we'll be able to forget it. I'll be back as soon as ever I can."

She kissed him.

"God bless you. And be careful, my darling!"

He kissed her again, and went out singing blithely. The world was very bright for Jerry Stannard that morning.

But the girl listened to the cheerful slamming of the door with a little frown, for she was troubled with misgivings.

It had all seemed so easy at the time, in the optimistic way in which he had told her the story, but reviewed in cold blood it presented dangers and difficulties in legion.

She wished, for both their sakes, that he had been able to stay with her that day, and her fears were soon to be justified.

Half an hour after he had gone, when the breakfast things had been cleared away and she was tidying herself to go out for a walk, there was a ring on the front door bell.

She answered it; and when she saw that it was Edgar Hayn, after what Jerry had been able to tell her, she would have closed the door in his face. But he had pushed through before she could collect her wits.

He led the way into the sitting-room, and she followed in mingled fear and anger.

Then she saw that there were dark rings round his eyes, and his face was haggard.

"What is it?" she asked coldly.

"The police," he said. "They're after me—and they're after you, too. I came to warn you."

"But why should they be after me?" she demanded blankly.

He was in a terrible state of nerves. His hands fidgeted with his umbrella all the time he was talking, and he did not meet her eyes.

"Drugs," he said gruffly. "Illicit drugs. Cocaine. You know what I mean! There's no harm in your knowing now—we're both in the same boat. They've been watching me, and they saw me with you yesterday and followed you."

"But how do you know?"

"I've got my friends at Scotland Yard," he snapped. "It's necessary. Policemen aren't incorruptible. But my man let me

down—he never gave me the tip till the last moment. They're going to raid this flat and search it this morning."

Her brain was like a maelstrom, but there was one solid fact to hold on to.

"There's nothing for them to find."

"That's where you're wrong! Those things I gave you—one of our other boxes got mixed up in them. I've just found that out. That's why I'm here. There's six ounces of cocaine in this flat!"

She recoiled, wide-eyed. Her heart was thumping madly. It all seemed too impossible, too fantastic. And yet it only bore out and amplified what Jerry had been able to tell her.

She wondered frantically if the excuse of innocence would convince a jury. Hayn saw the thought cross her mind, and shattered it.

"You know how Jerry's lived," he said. "No one would believe that you weren't both in it!"

He looked out of the window. She was impelled to follow his example, and she was in time to see two broad-shouldered men in bowler hats entering the house.

"They're here!" said Hayn breathlessly. "But there may be a chance. I recognised one of the men—he's a friend of mine. I may be able to square him."

Outside, a bell rang.

Hayn was scribbling something on a card.

"Take this," he uttered. "My car's outside. If I can get them away from you for a moment, slip out and show the card to the chauffeur. I've got a house at Hurley. He'll take you there, and I'll come down later and discuss how we're going to get you and Jerry out of the country."

The bell rang again, more urgently. Hayn thrust the pasteboard into the girl's hand.

"What're you hesitating for?" he snarled. "Do you want to stand in the dock at the Old Bailey beside your fiancée?"

Hardly knowing what she did, she put the card in her bag.

"Go and open the door," Hayn commanded. "They'll break in if you don't."

As he spoke, there came a yet more insistent ringing, and the flat echoed with the thunder of a knocker impatiently plied.

The girl obeyed, and at the same time

she was thinking furiously. Jerry—or his chief, this man Templar—would know how to deal with the crisis; but for the moment there was no doubt that Hayn's plan was the only practicable one. Her one idea was to stay out of the hands of the police long enough to make sure that Jerry was safe, and to give them time to think out an escape from the trap in which Hayn had involved them.

The two broad-shouldered men entered without ceremony as she opened the door.

"I am Inspector Harding, of Scotland Yard," said one of them formally, "and I have a warrant to search your flat. You are suspected of being in illegal possession of a quantity of cocaine."

The other man took her arm and led her into the sitting-room. Hayn came forward, frowning.

"I must protest about this," he said. "Miss Chandler is a friend of mine."

"That's unlucky for you," was the curt reply.

"I'll speak to Harding about this," threatened Hayn hotly, and at that moment Harding came in.

He was carrying a small cardboard box with the label of Laserre. "Poudre Laserre," the label said; but the powder was white and crystalline.

"I think this is all we need," said Harding, and stepped up to Gwen. "I shall take you into custody on a charge—"

Hayn came between them.

"I should like a word with you first," he said quietly.

Harding shrugged.

"If you must waste your time—"

"I'll take the risk," said Hayn. "In private, please."

Harding jerked his thumb.

"Take Chandler into another room, Jones."

"Jones had better stay," interrupted Hayn. "What I have to say concerns him also. If you will let Miss Chandler leave us for a minute, I will guarantee that she will not attempt to escape."

There was some argument, but eventually Harding agreed. Hayn opened the door for the girl, and as she went out he gave her an almost imperceptible nod.

She went into her bed-room and picked up the telephone. It seemed an eternity before the paging system of the Splendide found Jerry. When he answered, she told him what had happened.

"I'm going to Hayn's house at Hurley," she said. "It's the only way out at the moment. But tell Tremayne when he comes, and get hold of Templar, and do something quickly!"

He was beginning to object, to ask questions, but there was no time for that, and she hung up the receiver. She had no means of knowing what Hayn's methods of "squaring" were, or how long the negotiations might be expected to keep the detectives occupied.

She tiptoed down the hall, and opened the door.

From the window, Hayn, Harding, and Jones watched her cross the pavement and enter the car.

"She's a peach, boss," said Harding enviously.

"You've said all I wanted you to say," Hayn returned shortly. "But it's worked perfectly. If I'd simply tried to kidnap her, she'd have been twice as much nuisance. As it is, she'll be only too glad to do everything I say."

Dicky Tremayne, the King of Hearts, arrived two minutes after Hayn's car had driven off. He should have been there over an hour ago, but the cussedness of Fate had

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intervened to baulk one of the Saint's best-laid plans.

A bus had skidded into Tremayne's Wylie in Park Lane, the consequent policemen had delayed him interminably, the arrangements for the removal of his wrecked car had delayed him longer, and when at last he had got away in a taxi a series of traffic blocks had held him up at every crossing.

Now he had to act on his own initiative.

After a second's indecision, Tremayne realised that there was only one thing to do. If Hayn and his men were already in the flat, he must just blind in and hope for the best; if they had not yet arrived, no harm would be done.

He went straight into the building, and on the way up the stairs he met Hayn and two other men coming down. There was no time for deliberation or planning a move in advance.

"You're the birds I'm looking for," Tremayne rapped, barring the way. "I am Inspector Hancock, of Scotland Yard, and I shall arrest you—"

So far he got before Hayn lashed out at him. Tremayne ducked, and the next instant there was an automatic in his hand.

"Back up those stairs to the flat you've just left," he ordered, and the three men retreated before the menace of his gun.

They stopped at the door of the flat, and he told Hayn to ring. They waited.

"There seems to be no reply," said Hayn sardonically.

"Ring again," Tremayne directed grimly.

Another minute passed.

"There can't really be anyone at home," Hayn remarked.

Tremayne's eyes narrowed. It was something about the tone of Hayn's sneering voice.

"You hound!" said Tremayne through his teeth. "What have you done with her?"

"With whom?" inquired Hayn blandly.

"With Gwen Chandler!"

Tremayne could have bitten his tongue off as soon as the words were out of his mouth. That fatal, thoughtless impetuosity which was always letting him down! He saw Hayn suddenly go tense, and knew that it was useless to try to bluff further.

"So you're a King!" said Hayn softly.

"Yes, I am!" Tremayne let out recklessly. "And if you scabs don't want me to plug you full of holes—"

He had been concentrating on Hayn, the leader, and so he had not noticed one of the other men edging closer. A hand snatched at his gun, and wrenched. As Dicky Tremayne swung his fist to the man's jaw, Hayn dodged behind him and struck at the back of his head with a little rubber truncheon.

SERIOUS BUSINESS.

JERRY STANNARD never understood how he managed to contain himself until one o'clock. Much less did he ever understand how he waited the further half-hour which he gave Dicky Tremayne for grace. Perhaps no other man in the world but Simon Templar could have inspired such a blind loyalty.

The Saint was working some secret stratagem of his own, Stannard argued, and he had to meet Tremayne for some reason appertaining to the Saint's tactics.

In any case, if Gwen had

left when she telephoned, he could not have reached the flat before she had gone—and then he might only have blundered into the police trap that she had tried to save him from.

But it all connected up now—Gwen's Lasserre story, and what Stannard himself knew of Hayn, and more that he suspected—and the visions that it took only a little imagination to conjure up were dreadful.

When half-past one came, and there was still no sign of Tremayne, the suspense became intolerable.

Stannard went to the telephone, and fruitlessly searched London over the wires for Simon Templar. He could learn nothing from any of the clubs or hotels or restaurants which he might have frequented, nor was he any more successful with his flat.

As for the King of Hearts, Dicky Tremayne, Stannard did not even know him by sight—he had simply been told to leave his card with a page, and Tremayne would ask for him.

It was after two o'clock by that time, and Tremayne had not arrived. He tried to ring up Gwen Chandler's flat, but after an interminable period of ringing the exchange reported "No reply."

Jerry Stannard took a grip on himself. Perhaps that emergency was the making of him, the final consolidation of the process that had been started by the Saint, for Stannard had never been a fighting man. He had spoken the truth when he told Templar that his weakness was lack of "grit." But now he had got to act.

He didn't know nearly everything about Hayn, but he knew enough not to want to leave Gwen Chandler with that versatile gentleman for a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

But if anything was going to be done, Stannard had got to do it himself.

With a savage resolution, he telephoned to a garage where he was known. While he waited, he scribbled a note for Tremayne in which he described the whole series of events and stated his intentions. It was time wasted, but he was not to know that.

When the car arrived, he dismissed the

mechanic who had brought it round, and drove to Hurley.

He knew how to handle cars—it was one of his few really useful accomplishments. And he sent the hired Buick blazing west with his foot flat down on the accelerator for practically every yard of the way.

Even so, it was nearly five o'clock when he arrived in the Hurley district, and there he realised a difficulty. There were a lot of houses at Hurley, and he had no idea where Hayn's house might be. Nor had the post office, nor the nearest police.

Stannard, in the circumstances, dared not press his inquiries too closely. The only hope left to him was that he might be able to glean information from a village, for he was forced to conclude that Hayn tenanted his country seat under another name.

With this forlorn hope in view, he made his way to the Bell, and it was there that he met a surprising piece of good fortune.

As he pulled up outside, a man came out, and the man hailed him.

"Thank heaven, you're here," said Leonard Crockford without preface. "Come inside and have a drink!"

"Who are you?" asked a mystified Jerry Stannard.

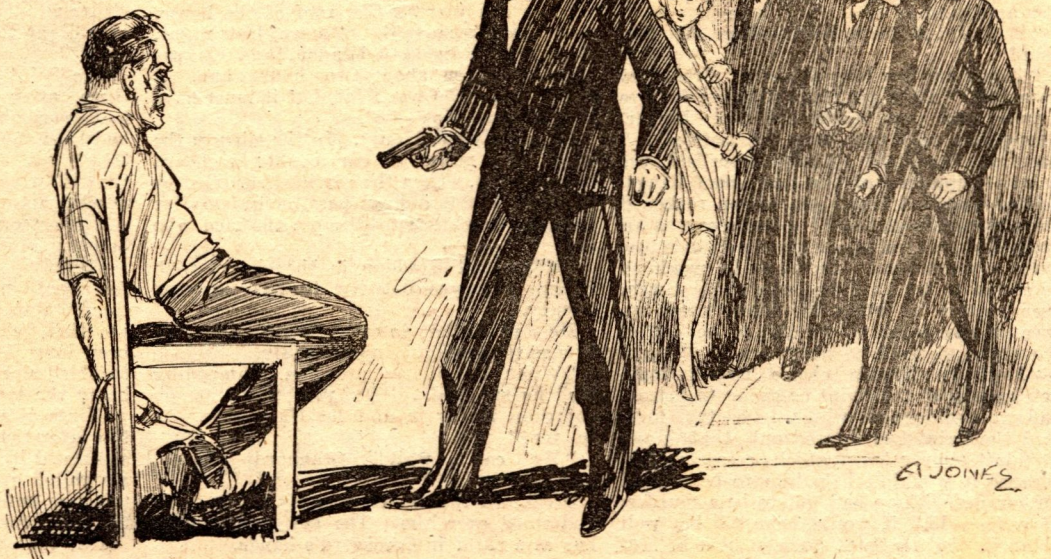
"You don't know me, but I know you," answered the man. "I am the King of Clubs."

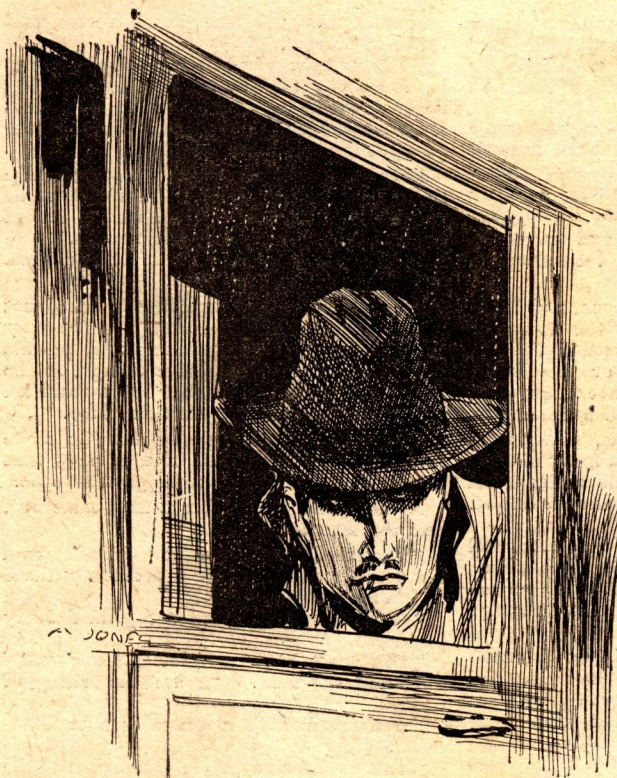
He listened with a grave face to Stannard's story.

"There's been a hitch somewhere," he said, when Jerry had finished. "The Saint kept you in the dark because he was afraid your natural indignation might run away with you. Hayn had designs on your girl friend—you might have guessed that. The Saint pinched a letter of Hayn's to Chastel—Hayn's man abroad—in which, among other things, Edgar described his plot for getting hold of Gwen. I suppose he wanted to be congratulated on his ingenuity."

"The rough idea was to plant some cocaine on Gwen in a present of powder and things from Lasserre, fake a police raid, and-pretend to square the police for her. Then, if she believed the police were after you and her—Hayn was banking on making her afraid

While Hayn threatened him with his automatic, Simon worked feverishly to sever the rope about his ankles.





Cautiously the King of Clubs peered from the car, and watched them lead the Joker away.

that you also were involved—he thought it would be easy to get her away with him.”

“And the Saint wasn’t doing anything to stop that?” demanded Jerry, white-lipped.

“Half a minute!” The Saint couldn’t deal with it himself, having other things to attend to, but he put the King of Hearts, the man Tremayne you were supposed to have met at the Splendide on the job. Tremayne was to get hold of Gwen before Hayn arrived and tell her the story—we were assuming that you hadn’t told her anything—and then bring her along to the Splendide and join up with you. The two of you were then to take Gwen down by car to the Saint’s bungalow at Maidenhead and stay down there, till the trouble had blown over.”

The boy was gnawing his finger-nails. He had had more time to think over the situation on the drive down, and Crockford’s story had only confirmed his own deductions. The vista of consequences that it opened up was appalling.

“What’s the Saint been doing all this time?”

“That’s another longish story,” Crockford answered. “He’d got Hayn’s cheque for five figures, and that made the risk bigger. There was only one way to settle it.” Leonard Crockford briefly described the Saint’s employing of the four spoof Kings. “After that was found out, Simon reckoned Hayn would think the Five business was all bluff, and he’d calculate there was only the Saint against him. Therefore he wouldn’t be afraid to try on his scheme about Gwen, even though he knew the Saint knew it, because the Saint was going to be out of the way.

“Anyhow, Hayn’s choice was between getting rid of the Saint or going to prison, and we could guess which he’d try first. And the Saint had figured out that Hayn wouldn’t simply try a quick assassination, because it wouldn’t help him to be wanted for murder. There had got to be a murder, of course, but it would have to be well planned. So the Saint guessed he’d be kid-

napped, somehow or other, first and taken away to some quiet spot to be done in, and he decided to play stalking-horse. He did that because if Hayn were arrested his cheques would be stopped automatically, so Hayn had got to be kept busy till to-morrow morning.

“I was watching outside the Saint’s flat in a fast car last night, as I’d been detailed to do, in case of accidents. The Saint was going to make a fight of it. But they got him somehow—I saw him taken out to a car they had waiting—and I followed down here. Tremayne was to be waiting at the Splendide for a phone call from me at two o’clock.

“I’ve been trying to get him ever since, and you as well, touring London over the toll line, and it’s cost a small fortune. And I didn’t dare go back to London, because of leaving the Saint here. That’s why I’m darned glad you’ve turned up.”

“But why haven’t you told the police?”

“Simon’d never forgive me. He’s out to make the Five Kings the terror of the underworld, and he won’t do that by simply giving information to Scotland Yard. The idea of the gang is to punish people suitably before handing them over to the law, and our success over Hayn depends on sending five figures of his money to charity. I know it’s a terrible risk. The Saint may have been killed already. But he knew what he was doing. We were ordered not to interfere, and the Saint’s the head man in this show.”

Stannard sprang up.

“But Hayn’s got Gwen!” he half-sobbed. Crockford, we can’t hang about, not for anything, while Gwen’s—”

“We aren’t hanging about any longer,” said Crockford quietly.

His hand fell with a firm grip on Jerry Stannard’s arm, and the youngster steadied up. Crockford led him to the window of the smoke-room, and pointed.

“You can just see the roof of the house, over there,” he said. “Since last night, Hayn’s gone back to London, and his car came by again about two hours ago. I couldn’t see who was in it, but it must have been Gwen. Now—”

He broke off suddenly. In the silence, the drone of a powerful car could be heard approaching. Then the car itself whirled by at speed, but it did not pass too quickly for Leonard Crockford to glimpse the men who rode in it.

“Hayn and Braddon in the back, with Dicky Tremayne between them!” he said tensely.

He was in time to catch Stannard by the arm as the boy broke away wildly.

“What the blazes are you stampeding for!” he snapped. “Do you want to go charging madly in and let Hayn rope you in, too?”

“We can’t wait!” Stannard panted, struggling.

Crockford thrust him roughly into a chair and stood over him. The boy was as helpless as a child in Crockford’s hands.

“You keep your head and listen to me!” Leonard commanded sharply. “We’ll have another drink and tackle this sensibly. And I’m going to see that you wolf a couple of sandwiches before you do anything. You’ve been in a panic for hours, with no lunch, and you look about all in. I want you to be useful!”

“If we ’phone the police—”

“Nothing doing!”

Leonard Crockford’s contradiction ripped out almost automatically. He was not the Saint’s right-hand man for nothing. He had learnt the secret of being the perfect lieutenant, which is the secret in any emergency divining at once what your superior officer would want you to do.

It was no use simply skinning out any old how—the emergency had got to be dealt with in a way that would dovetail in with the Saint’s general plan of campaign.

“The police are our last resort,” he said. “We’ll see if the two of us can’t fix this alone. Leave this to me.”

He ordered a brace of stiff whiskies and a pile of sandwiches, and while these were being brought he wrote a letter, which he sealed. Then he went in search of the proprietor, whom he knew of old, and gave him the letter.

“If I’m not here to claim that in two hours,” he said, “I want you to open it and telephone what’s inside to Scotland Yard. Will you do that for me, as a great favour, and ask no questions?”

Mr. Taylor agreed, somewhat perplexedly.

“Is it a joke?” he asked good-humouredly.

“It concerns a Joker,” Leonard Crockford replied. “But I give you my word of honour that if I’m not back at eight o’clock, and that message isn’t opened and ’phoned punctually, the consequences may include some of the most unhumorous things that ever happened!”

A TRUMP CARD.

THE SAINT had slept. As soon as they had arrived at the house in Hurley (he knew it was Hurley, for he had travelled that road many times over the course of several summers) he had been pushed into a barely-furnished bed-room and left to his own devices. These were not numerous, for the ropes had not been taken off his wrists.

A short tour of inspection of the room had shown that, in the circumstances, it formed an effective prison. The window, besides being shuttered, was closely barred; the door was of three-inch oak, and the key had been taken away after it had been locked. For weapons with which to attack either window or door there was the choice of a light table, a wooden chair, or a bed-post.

The Saint might have employed any of these, after cutting himself free—for they had overlooked, in the search to which he had been subjected, the little knife strapped to his calf under his sock—but he judged that the time was not yet ripe for any such drastic action. Besides, he was tired; he saw strenuous times ahead of him, and he believed in husbanding his energies.

Therefore he had settled down on the bed for a good night’s rest, making himself as comfortable as a man can when his hands are tied behind his back, and it had not been long before he had fallen into an untroubled sleep. It struck him, drowsily, as being the most natural thing to do.

Glints of sunlight were stabbing through the interstices of the shutters when he was awakened by the sound of his door opening. He rolled over, opening one eye, and saw two men enter. One carried a tray of food, the other carried a club.

This concession to the respect in which the

gang held him, even when bound and helpless, afforded the Saint infinite amusement.

"This is sweet of you," he said; and, indeed, he thought it was, for he had not expected such a consideration, and he was feeling hungry. "But, my angels of mercy," he said, "I can't eat like this."

They sat him in a chair and tied his ankles to the legs of it, and then the cords were taken off his wrists and he was able to stretch his cramped arms.

They watched him eat, standing by the door, and the cheerful comments with which he sought to enliven the meal went unanswered. But a request for the time evoked the surly information that it was past one o'clock.

When he had finished, one of the men fastened his hands again, while the other stood by with his bludgeon at the ready. Then they untied his ankles and left him, taking the tray with them.

By five o'clock he was yawning almost continuously, having thought out seventeen original and fool-proof methods of swindling swindlers without coming within reach of the law, and this and similar exercises of ingenuity were giving him no more kick at all.

For the second time, it was the sound of his door opening that roused him, and he blinked his eyes open with a sigh.

It was Edgar Hayn who came in. Physically, he was in much worse case than the Saint, for he had had no sleep at all since the Friday night, and his mind had been much less care-free.

His tiredness showed in the pallor of his face and the bruise-like puffiness of his eyes, but he had the air of one who feels himself master of a situation.

"Evening," murmured Simon politely.

Hayn came over to the bedside, his lips drawn back in an unlovely smile.

"Still feeling bumptious, Templar?" he asked.

"When there are grey skies," answered the Saint winningly, after the manner of Al Jolson, "I don't mind the grey skies. You make them blue, Sonny Boy."

The man who had held the bludgeon at lunch stood in the doorway. Hayn stood aside, and beckoned him in.

"There are some friends of yours downstairs," said Hayn. "I should like to have you all together."

"I should be charmed to oblige you—as the actress said to the bishop," replied the Saint.

And he wondered whom Hayn could be referring to, but he showed nothing of the chill of uneasiness that had lapped him for an instant like an Arctic wind.

He was not left long in doubt.

The bludgeon merchant jerked him to his feet and marched him down the corridor and down the stairs, Hayn bringing up the rear. The door of a room opening off the hall stood ajar, and from within came a murmur of voices which faded into stillness as their footsteps were heard approaching. Then the door was kicked wide, and the Saint was thrust into the room.

Gwen Chandler was there—he saw her at once. There were also three men whom he knew, and one of them was a dishevelled Dicky Tremayne.

Hayn closed the door and came into the centre of the room.

"Now what about it, Templar?" he said.

"What, indeed?" echoed the Saint.

His lazy eyes shifted over the assembled company.

"Greetings, Herr Braddon," he murmured. "Hallo, Snake! Great heavens, Snake! What's the matter with your face?"

"What's the matter with my face?" Ganning snarled.

"Everything, honeybunch," drawled the Saint. "I was forgetting—you were born like that!"

He looked across at the girl, fighting sobbingly in Hayn's hold.

"It's all right, Gwen, old thing," he said. "Keep smiling, for Jerry's sake. We don't worry about everything these dregs can do. Don't let them see they can hurt you!"

Hayn passed the girl over to Braddon and Ganning, and went over to a chair in which Simon had been dumped and securely tied.

"I'm going to ask you one or two questions, Templar," he said. "If you don't want me to let the Snake have another go at you, you'll answer them truthfully."

"Pleasure," said the Saint briefly. "George Washington was the idol of my childhood."

Everything he had planned had suffered a sudden reversal. Gwen Chandler had been caught, and so had Dicky. Their only hope was in Leonard Crockford—and how long would it be before he discovered the disaster and got busy? The Saint made up his mind.

"How many more of you are there?"

"Seventy-six," said the Saint. "Two from five—just like when you were at Borstal."

There was no one behind him. He had got his legs well back under the chair. His arms were also reaching back, and he was edging his little knife out of its sheath.

"You can save the rest of your questions," he said. "I'll tell you something. You'll never get away with this. You think you're going to find out all about my organisation, the plans I've made, and whether I've arranged for a squeal to the police. Then you'll counter-move accordingly. Hold the line while I laugh!"

"I don't think so," said Hayn.

"Then you don't think as much as a weevil with sleepy sickness," said the Saint equably. "You must think I was born yesterday! Listen, sweetheart! Last night I posted a little story to Inspector Teal, which he'll get Monday morning. That letter's in the post now, and nothing will stop it—and the letter to friend Henri I enclosed with it will make sure the dicks pay a lot of attention to the rest of the things I had to say. You haven't an earthly, Edgarvitch!"

Hayn stepped back as if he had received a blow, and his face was horribly ashen. The Saint had never imagined that he would cause such a sensation.

"I told you he'd squeak!" Braddon was raging. "You fool—I told you!"

"I told him, too," said the Saint. "Oh, Edgar—why didn't you believe your Uncle Simon?"

Hayn came erect, his eyes blazing. He swung round on Braddon.

"Be quiet, you puppy!" he commanded harshly. "We've all the time we want. There's always been the chance that it might come to this—that's why we've got those aeroplanes. We leave to-night, and Teal can look for us to-morrow as long as he likes."

He turned on the Saint.

"You'll come with us—you and your friend. You will not be strapped in. Somewhere in mid-Channel we shall loop the loop. You understand? Templar, you've undone years of work, and I'm going to make you pay for it! I shall escape, and after a time I shall be able to come back and start again. But you—"

"I shall be flitting through Paradise, with a halo round my hat," murmured the Saint. "What a pleasant thought!"

YOU CAN'T PINCH YOUR FINGERS—



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And as he spoke he felt his little knife biting into the cords on his wrists.

"We lose everything we've got," Braddon babbled.

"Including your liberty," said the Saint softly, and the knife was going through his cord like a wire through cheese.

They all looked at him. Something in the way he had spoken those three words, something in the taut reposefulness of his body, some strange power of personality, held them spellbound. Bound and at their mercy, for all they knew, an unarmed man, he was yet able to dominate them.

There was hatred and murder flaring in their eyes, and yet for a space he was able to hold them on a curb and compel them to listen.

"I will tell you why you have lost, Hayn," said the Saint, speaking in the same gentle, leisured tones that nevertheless quelled them as definitely as if he had backed them up with a gun. "You made the mistake of kidding yourself that when I told you I was going to put you in prison I was bluffing. You were sure that I'd never throw away such an opening for unlimited blackmail.

"Your miserable warped mentality couldn't conceive the idea of a man doing and risking all that I did and risked for nothing but an ideal. You judged me by your own crooked standards.

"That's where you crashed, because I'm not a crook. But I'm going to make crooks go in fear of me. You and your kind aren't scared enough of the police. You've got used to them—you call them by their first names and swap cigarettes with them when they arrest you—it's become a game to you, with prison as a forfeit for a mistake, and bull-baiting's just the same as tiddly-winks in your lives. But I'm going to give you something new to fear—the Unknown, the Five Kings, the unbeatable hand, barring accidents.

"You'll rave about us in the dock, and all the world will hear. And when we have finished with you, you will go to prison, and you will be an example to make others afraid. But you will tell the police that you cannot describe us, because there are still three left whom you do not know; and if we two came to any harm through you, the other three would deal with you, and they would not deal gently. You understand? You will never dare to speak—"

"And do you think you will ever be able to speak, Templar?" asked Hayn, in a quivering voice, and his right hand was leaping to his hip pocket.

And the Saint chuckled, a low, triumphant murmur of a laugh.

"I'm sure of it!" he said, and stood up, his legs free, and the cords falling from his wrists.

The little throwing-knife flashed across the room like a chip of flying quicksilver, and Hayn, with his automatic levelled at the Saint, felt a pain like the searing of a hot iron across his knuckles, and all the strength went out of his fingers.

Braddon was drawing at that moment, but the Saint was swift. He had Edgar Hayn in a grip of steel, and Hayn's body was between the Saint and Braddon.

"Get behind him, Snake!" Braddon shrielled; but as Ganning moved to obey, the Saint reached a corner.

"Aim at the girl, you fool!" Hayn gasped, with the Saint's hand tightening on his throat.

The Saint held Hayn with one hand only, but the strength of that hold was incredible. With the other hand, he was fumbling with his cigarette-case.

Braddon had turned his gun into Gwen Chandler's face, while Ganning pinioned her arms. And the Saint had a cigarette in his mouth, and was striking a match with one hand.

"Now do you surrender?" Braddon menaced.

"Like the deuce I do!" cried the Saint.

His match had touched the end of his cigarette, and in the same movement he threw the cigarette far from him. It made an explosive hiss like a launched rocket, and in a second everything was blotted out in a swirl of impenetrable yellow fog.

Templar pushed Hayn away into the opacity. He knew to a fraction of a square inch where his knife had fallen after it had severed the tendons of Hayn's hand, and he dived for it. He bumped against Tremayne's chair, and cut him free in four quick slashes.

Came, from the direction of the window, the sound of smashing glass. A shadow showed momentarily through the mist.

"Gwen!"

It was Jerry Stannard's agonised voice. The girl answered him. They sought each other in the obscurity.

A sudden draught parted the wreathing clouds of the Saint's rapid-action smoke-screen. Stannard, with the girl in his arms, saw that the door was open. The Saint's unmistakable silhouette loomed in the oblong of light.

"Very, very efficient, Dogface!" said the Saint.

"You can always leave these little things to me," said Mr. Crockford modestly, leaning against the front door, with Edgar Hayn, Braddon and Snake Ganning herded into a corner of the hall at the unfriendly end of his automatic.

They took the three men into a room where there was no smoke.

"It was my fiancée," pleaded Jerry Stannard.

"That's so," said the Saint tolerantly. "Dicky, you'll have to be content with Braddon. After all, he sloshed you when your hands were tied. But nobody's going to come between the Snake and this child!"

It lasted half an hour all told, and then they gathered up the three components of the mess and trussed them very securely into chairs.

"There were two other men," said the Saint hopefully, wrapping his handkerchief round a skinned set of knuckles.

"I stuck them up, and Jerry dotted them with a spanner," said Crockford. "We locked them in a room upstairs."

The Saint sighed.

"I suppose we'll have to leave them," he said. "Personally, I feel I've been done. These guys are rotten poor fighters when it comes to a straight show-down."

Then Crockford remembered the message he had left at the Bell, and they piled hurriedly into the car which Crockford and Stannard had driven up in. They retrieved the message, tidied themselves, and dined.

"I think we can call it a day," said the Saint comfortably, when coffee was on the table. "The cheque will be cashed on Monday morning, and the proceeds will be registered to the London Hospital, as arranged—less our ten per cent. commission, which I don't mind saying I think we've earned. I think I shall enclose five kings from a nice new pack of playing-cards; a case like this ought to finish in a worthily dramatic manner, and that opportunity's too good to miss."

He stretched himself luxuriously, and lighted a fresh cigarette, which did not explode.

"Before I go to bed to-night," he said, "I'll drop a line to old Teal and tell him where to look for our friends. I'm afraid they'll have a hungry and uncomfortable night, but I can't help that. And now, my infants, I suggest that we adjourn to London."

"Who's coming back with me?" asked Tremayne.

"I'm going back without you, laddie," said Jerry Stannard. "Gwen's coming with me!"

They cheered the Buick out of sight, and then the Saint climbed into the back of the Furillac and settled himself at his ease.

"Mr. Crockford will drive," he said. "Deprived of my charming conversation, you may ponder over the fact that our friend is undoubtedly for it. You may also rehearse the song which I've just composed for us to sing at his funeral—I mean wedding. It's about a wicked young lover named Jerry, who had methods decidedly merry. When the party got rough, was he smart with his stuff? Oh, very! Oh, very! Oh, very! . . . Take me to the Savoy, Dogface. I have a date. . . . Night-night, dear old bacteria!"

THE END.

The Solution of this week's

'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

on page 362.

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside-down.

1. The tyre tracks which at first baffled Elkin were clearly those of an aeroplane. The tyre tracks compared with the width of the automobile tracks indicate an aeroplane. The narrow tyres, without markings, and the mid-tracks made by the metal tail skid of the machine are also characteristic. 2. A detective would in all probability radio a general alarm for aeroplanes seen anywhere in the vicinity, try to learn the direction each had taken, where it had landed, and make a thorough check-up of all such machines.

THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS OF—

THE TRAPPER!

By
GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.

QUENTON THOROLD EXPLAINS.

"OH, no! My intention was to fling a scare into them that would make them amenable to my directions," answered the prisoner. "Their prolonged sojourn in the cellar was due to your activities. When we began to believe that the house was being reconnoitred by your men we had to clear out. It was impossible to take them with us, and equally out of the question to turn them loose. In case we were mistaken, and you did not raid the place, I arranged a pistol at the cellar door. If that had not gone off by a certain time we should have returned to release them. Naturally, there was a risk to them; but even if they had died it would have been one of the chances of war."

The detective bent unbelieving eyes upon him.

"You didn't want them to die, and yet you set a murder trap for the man who should open the door. It was only a chance that saved him."

The other shook his head in contemptuous denial.

"Nothing of the kind. I had no blank cartridges, but if you had examined the alignment of that weapon you would have seen that a bullet fired from it must have passed at least a foot above the head of anyone opening the door. It was merely an alarm."

"The pistol was one which had belonged to Mr. Thorold."

"Yes. It was one that I had found in his rooms. I had not thought of it," added Watkins, "but possibly it helped to clinch your suspicions against him."

"You said just now that you were trying to encourage my—er—fallacy about Mr. Thorold. Yet directly I had him in custody you went out of your way to exonerate him. This note that you left for me last night—"

Again the butler sneered.

"You are trying to score a point like an Old Bailey counsel. True, I was willing to divert suspicion from myself, but I was not at all keen to see Mr. Thorold hanged. I had not supposed that anything could be built up against him that would put him in real danger. When I saw you were in earnest I determined to head you off. I believed I could do so without exposing myself to any danger. I had in mind an idea which would have stopped all further investigation so far as I was concerned."

Wilde fiddled with the bottom button of his waistcoat.

"You mean the fire. You think me a bit of a fool, Watkins. But I doubt if in your place I would have been such a fool as you. If I had had a fire to cover my traces I shouldn't have left obvious indications of arson. I gather that I was intended to believe that you and your wife had been burned to death. You overplayed your hand. Until this morning it had not entered into my mind to identify you as the Trapper. But when those bones were proved to be old anatomical specimens I began to think. And although I am still in the dark as to how Miss Langton and Mr. Thorold got on to you, I think the result would have been much about the same. Please don't think I am not grateful for a short cut." He bowed to Thorold and the woman.

Watkins had stuck one thumb in his waistcoat pocket, and for the first time during the interview he fixed his gaze full on the detective.

"We all make mistakes—even Scotland Yard men," he said with irony. His face clouded, and he went on in a dull monotone as though talking to himself. "This is the end of the road. I've had my run. But I regret nothing. The world is the better for the example that I have made. I've made blunders—I can see that now. Had I been more careful—had I a little longer—I might have done more. Don't forget, Wilde, that I solemnly declare my entire responsibility for everything done by the Trapper. No one else is to be blamed. Mr. Thorold, you have behaved like a gentleman and a sportsman. Thank you. Good-bye!"

His hand flashed to his lips, and Wilde sprang towards him with an exclamation. A small bottle tinkled to the floor as he caught the other's arm. A faint odour filled the apartment. The butler slithered slowly out of his chair, a fixed grin in which there was something of a grim triumph on his face.

"Done you at the finish, Wilde," he declared, with a choking gurgle, and lay still.

Thorold and the detective bent over the body.

"Poor devil! He's out!" announced the millionaire.

"Prussic acid," said Wilde, sniffing the air. "But I searched him! I was afraid of something like this. Please ring for a doctor, Miss Langton."

There was nothing that a doctor could do. Wilde knew that a medical inspection was a formality. Prussic acid kills as surely and as swiftly as a rifle bullet.

As speedily as possible the chief inspector had given appropriate instructions to meet the situation. Within half an hour the dead body of the butler, that grim smile still on its face, had been removed.

Neither Miss Langton nor Thorold had left the hotel. Wilde had hinted that he wished them to remain, and his request jumped with their inclinations. He came to them after a while with a sober face.

"I make no complaints, Mr. Thorold," he said, as he dropped into a chair, "but I would have you remember that my first action when that man came into the room was to search him. There was no poison on him then. It is a serious thing for a police officer when a prisoner in his custody commits suicide."

The millionaire met his gaze steadily.

"No," he agreed. "I had searched him myself before you arrived. I took that bottle from him. During our interview I was seated close to him. He picked your pocket once—it may be that he played a similar trick on me."

There was a dead silence for a matter of seconds while Wilde continued his grave scrutiny of the other's face. Presently he made a gesture as though putting the subject aside.

"After all, I can prove nothing, and I'm not sure I would if I could. The man's dead."

"You'll be having something more to say, Mr. Thorold," Wilde suggested.

The millionaire looked up.

"One great advantage that this country has over mine is that nobody has thought of an eighteenth amendment to the constitution," he observed. "So you're waiting for papa to tell you. Shall I, Pat? Well, say, listen."

"In this little job, Wilde, Pat and I really started with a pull over you. We knew I

wasn't the Trapper. You didn't. I'm a slow starter, but Pat—well, when she gets going she's a world-beater. I don't want to rub it in, but you were all wrong about me from the start. Instead of being a subtle machiavellian sort of bird I'm just a simple-minded sort of a dub."

"You met me after a murder had been committed and I had a lethal weapon in my possession. In my impulsive innocence I jumped in and offered to help Scotland Yard. That I guess was worse than an impertinence. It was an outrage. No wonder you distrusted me—but no matter. Your suspicions were confirmed when on your first visit to my house you were presented with a wire noose enclosed in an envelope similar to those I used. In your place I would have believed the same as you. It looked obvious."

"Those three pieces of wire certainly staggered me at that time. I was in the air. It was after you had gone that Pat suggested that they must have come from someone in the house. I found it difficult to suspect the perfect Watkins and his wife, but they were the only reasonable supposition. We decided to wait and see. It was a delicate position. I couldn't very well ask my butler whether he had committed murder, could I?"

"We kept an eye on Mr. and Mrs. Watkins and made a few discreet inquiries. I'll say they were careful, but we did get one point. Both of them had been out on the night of the murder, and no other of the servants had any knowledge of the hour at which they had returned."

"When I traced Stella," interposed Miss Langton, "I got a little further. From my talk with her it seemed quite possible that Mrs. Watkins was the woman who had spirited her away."

"That story of how you got the girl was straight, then," said the detective sharply. "I wish you'd said something about the Watkins woman."

"Don't blame Pat," said Thorold. "I told her there could be no harm in probing a bit farther before we put you wise to our guess. For it was only a guess at the time. We had nothing solid against Mr. and Mrs. Watkins. Besides, I was anxious to make good my promise and get Estrehan for you. The day Stella Cliffe was first taken to Scotland Yard I found the joint in Farringdon Street. I made up my mind then to tell you everything. I planned to spring Watkins on you."

"I'm a temperamental man, Wilde, and when you burst in on me that day you kind of jarred me."

Thorold had insensibly permitted a harsh note to creep into his voice. He returned now to his old nonchalant, easy tone.

"Oh, I'm not kicking! I'm just explaining the reason for my attitude. I adopted your rules. You didn't trust me, and I wasn't going to confide in you. It was entertaining to see an old hand going off the rails. I had a word with Pat, and she agreed with me that we should go ahead, clean up, and tell you when we got good and ready—not before. Our trump card was Watkins, but we had another ace in our hands in Stella. We—or rather Pat—kept in close touch with her. We felt that sooner or later the Trapper would try to make some use of her. In any event, Estrehan was likely to attempt some communication."

Wilde nodded.

"I anticipated that myself."

"Yes. That was why you had her watched. Probably there would have been earlier developments if you hadn't. And talking about shadowing, that retinue you tacked on to me was confoundingly embarrassing at times. I couldn't always keep an eye on Watkins' outside movements. Then he himself got some notion that I was camping on his trail. I tell you it wasn't so easy. One thing I did do. I kept a little diary of his absences and those of his wife from the house. I jotted it down in Greek, because I felt that Watkins might be keeping tabs of me as closely as I was of him, and I didn't think his education extended so far as the dead languages. Now, whenever any little incident in which the Trapper was

(Continued on page 362.)

THE GREAT BANK ROBBERY

Problem No. 13 of **BAFFLERS!** The Popular Detective Story Game.

In late November of 19— had not been unseasonably warm, or if Detective-Inspector Elkins of the Northern Police had not been so observant, it is almost certain that the resourceful robbers of the Imperial Bank in a country town, would have escaped punishment. As it was, though the bandits themselves were captured, their confederates escaped and the money was never recovered.

The robbery had been well planned. As Detective-Inspector Elkins afterwards established, the four bandits entered the bank soon after the opening hour. McCrory, the leader, was effectively disguised as a crippled war veteran, limping with a hesitancy which was soon abandoned in the swift action that followed. His companions were conventionally garbed in blue suits, each wearing a false beard or moustache; and two were spectacles.

The alluring objective was the acquisition of three large factory pay-rolls, which the robbers knew were being prepared at that hour for representatives of the factories. These, totalling £20,000, were swept into bags within a few seconds of the beginning of the well-timed and cold-blooded assault. The men dashed out, leaped into a black racing car, and were around the corner before anyone dared to spread the alarm. Police followed in commandeered cars, but they lost the trail within a few minutes in the morning traffic and were baffled to know which way to proceed.

Ten minutes later police headquarters received word from a suburban section that a car containing four men was speeding on one of the highways to the north of the town. Detective-Inspector Elkins was rushed to the spot and picked up there a brief description of the car. The informant was able to point out the exact tracks made by the car. Inspector Elkins followed them,

having left instructions to telephone ahead to all possible destinations of the road taken by the speeding car and have police of the various communities head it off.

There was little difficulty in following the track of the car. Its distinctive tyre impressions led seven miles due north on the main highway, then a mile to the west on the broad, dusty Derham road flanked by level meadows. At this point the car's tracks mingled with other tyre tracks, which baffled the pursuers for a distance of about a third of a mile.

However, certain that the fleeing car could have gone on in only one way, Elkins directed his driver to forge ahead, and at the end of the one-third mile stretch the car's distinctive tracks again appeared alone in the road.

A few minutes later he reached the town of Derham and there learned that a touring car containing four men had driven through in leisurely fashion twenty minutes before. Their descriptions, however, differed so radically from those broadcast by the police at headquarters that the local constable had not interfered with them. None had a beard or moustache or glasses, and all four were chatting gaily. They had been observed by several persons, and a fair description had been gleaned: two wore light grey tweed suits and overcoats; the other two, brown clothes. They were young,



Section of the Derham Road showing mysterious tracks discovered by Detective-Inspector Elkins in pursuing the robbers of the Imperial Bank.

and the constable had taken them for college students on an outing.

Inspector Elkins wisely telephoned ahead to the next town, and had them arrested on suspicion. They indignantly denied all knowledge of the crime and invited search of their persons and of the automobile. Nothing whatever incriminating was found. Inspector Elkins managed to have them held, however, until he had time to investigate further the confusion of tyre tracks which had baffled him back on the Derham road. After some thought and study the mystery was explained. A diagrammatic sketch of a section of the Derham road is shown herewith.

What do you deduce? What had happened? The questions to be answered are:

1. What had happened on the Derham road where the confusion of tyre tracks baffled Elkins? (Marks 7.)
2. What step should a good detective have taken immediately in an effort to recover the money? (Marks 3.)

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 13—there will be another next week. Briefly you are told the story of a crime and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. Be your own detective. Read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

Award yourself marks as indicated after comparing your answers with those given on page 360. These answers are printed upside down so that they may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the sense of your solution, not its exact wording, that counts.

Try a baffler on your friends. Read the problem to them and see what they can make of it, awarding a small prize—if you like—to the first to give the correct solution.

THE TRAPPER

(Continued from page 361.)

concerned broke out Watkins was away from the house."

"I'll make you a present of this," observed the detective. "I instructed my men to be very careful with your servants. We had picked up their records, of course, and they were all clean. Both Watkins and his wife seemed utterly beyond suspicion. After our early inquiries, it seemed a waste of time to worry about them. It looked as if we might lose more than we gained."

"As a matter of fact," pursued Thorold, "I was a little afraid you might stumble across something through watching them and burst up our little scheme. I couldn't understand why you didn't."

"Among other things," interposed Miss Langton, "we had got possession of the Ogle jewels."

Wilde straightened in his chair. "What?" he exclaimed.

Thorold nodded.

"That surprises you, does it? The position was this: Watkins, having got the jewels from Paddy, either did not know where to dispose of them, or was afraid to take any action for a while. I found them hidden behind a tier of books in my study. I handed them over to Pat to hold."

"Where are they now?" demanded the detective.

"In a vault of the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit," answered Miss Langton. "They were dangerous things to be found in the keeping of either of us. So I put them in the safe deposit and sent the keys in a sealed package to a cousin of mine to look after for me."

"You were right," commented Wilde, his eyes twinkling. "If I had found either of you with those jewels I should have needed a lot of convincing that Watkins was to be blamed."

"Well, Pat prevented me from abandoning our idea of getting to the bottom of the thing," went on the millionaire. "Right on top of

that decision you turned up with the announcement that the Trapper had got hold of Stella. That left us flabbergasted for the instant. But although we had lost the girl we still had Watkins. Through him we got on to the house in Canonbury almost as quickly as Scotland Yard—though far be it from me to disparage the very smart piece of work you pulled off."

"We had a little pow-wow, Pat and I, and we thought up something else. The question was, would you give us time? As we more than half-expected, you didn't. You put me under arrest. I was pretty scared."

"You didn't show it," said Wilde grimly.

"All the same, I was. It would have been especially awkward if you'd tied up Pat at the same time. Watkins would almost certainly have got clean away."

"You think so?" There was a touch of scepticism in Wilde's tone.

"I see no reason why he shouldn't. The odds were that no one would believe what we

said. Now our idea was to put a bluff across Watkins, and for that reason one of us had to be at liberty—preferably myself. We intended that the little scene we have just had with him should be staged at Charges Street last night. This hotel was selected as an alternative rendezvous in case I should be unable to play my part."

Miss Langton broke in.

"You see, Mr. Wilde, the contingency happened. With Quenton out of the way it would have been awkward for many reasons for me to face Watkins in that house alone. So late last night, after my talk with you, I sent a little note to him in disguised handwriting. I enclosed a wire noose. This is a copy of the note."

She produced a sheet of paper from her handbag and passed it to Wilde, who read:

"Unless you wish all the information in our possession to be made public, you will call and see us at Room 213, Regal Hotel, at two-thirty to-morrow. You will come prepared to pay for silence.—Those Who Know."

"Why," asked the detective, looking from one to the other, "this suggestion of blackmail?"

Miss Langton smoothed her dress.

"A psychological touch," she explained. "It was intended to leave Watkins in some uncertainty as to the senders of the message. If he had a notion that it came perhaps from some of his own gang whom he could bribe or menace to secrecy, he was more likely to obey than on a summons signed by Mr. Thorold or myself. And the mere fact that he did obey would be an admission."

"It also explains the sudden burning of the house," declared Wilde. "With the possibility of imminent exposure it would be helpful to him if it was supposed that he and his wife had been burnt to death."

"That may have been in his mind," said Thorold. "I happened to know that he was almost entirely unsuspecting of Miss Langton as the writer, because he told me so. He supposed me to be still in custody, and I think it shook him a little when I was the first person he met at the entrance-hall. I grabbed him by the wrist, and he dared not risk a scene. So I got him to accompany me to this suite where he suddenly broke loose. He fought like a madman, but with the help of Miss Langton, I searched him and took this thing from him." He tapped the pistol on the table. "Then with a little persuasion he began to see reason, and coughed up the outlines of the story that you afterwards heard him tell."

"Persuasion?" Wilde hitched his eyebrows a trifle.

Thorold looked at him blankly and then laughed.

"Perhaps our methods were not of the orthodox official standard. All it amounted to was this. I told him enough to let him see that we had a strong line on him. Perhaps I embroidered a little. I added that you would arrive shortly, and that we should turn him over to you. I hinted that in the circumstances he might let us have the straight story from his side. He accepted my conditions."

"This is the first we have heard of conditions," said Wilde, slipping his hands into his trousers-pockets and slumping luxuriously backwards in his chair. "Don't get alarmed. I'm not going to ask what sort of a bargain you made with him. But I guess you used some strong inducement to make him come across with a confession."

"Well, you heard it," retorted Thorold. "What does it matter to you how it was obtained?"

Wilde stared him full in the eye.

"Nothing to do with me," he admitted. "What I don't know won't hurt me. Only I can't help thinking how it might have been done—*might*, I said. Suppose someone had gone to this fellow and said, 'Watkins, the game's up. We've got the goods on you. We're going to hand you over to the police. Now we'll make a bargain with you. You tell us your story and you repeat it to Chief Detective Inspector Wilde. Then if you don't want to stand a trial we won't prevent you from taking the way out that you had determined upon.'" He tapped his waistcoat-pocket suggestively. "Perhaps something was said about helping Mrs. Watkins if she was captured. I don't say *this* *did* happen. But it is conceivable to me as one way of explaining things."

Neither the man nor the woman answered him for a second. Then Thorold spoke gravely. "You're letting your imagination run loose again, Wilde. No use threshing the air. You've been doing the questioning up to now. We're entitled to ask you one or two things."

The detective pulled a watch from his pocket and studied it attentively.

"I'd love to talk," he said, "but I have to see Mrs. Watkins. I had her arrested half an hour ago. Suppose you two folk come and see me at Scotland Yard to-morrow at about this time—"

"You've got the woman?" cried Miss Langton.

The corners of Wilde's mouth wrinkled.

"Why not?" he asked, and slid out of the door.

WHAT MARTIN WILDE KNEW.

THERE are moments in a criminal investigation when the smothering baffling fog of conjecture and guesswork is suddenly dissipated and the roads to a given end are revealed with comparative clearness. With

the unmasking of Watkins, Wilde was able to cut away from all the extraneous avenues into which the search had led and concentrate on a definite line. This was the sort of thing which the organisation of the Criminal Investigation Department could take, so to speak, at the gallop. The result was almost a mathematical certainty.

Yet as he sat with legs outstretched in the leather chair by Winter's desk he felt himself like a schoolboy before his master as he expounded the events which had brought about the climax. With a detached honesty of mind he made no attempt to palliate the processes of mind that had so nearly led him astray. He might have done so to others—but not to Winter.

The chief constable, the ends of his lips betraying occasional signs of amusement, heard him as he stood with one arm on the mantelpiece, his other hand jingling a bunch of keys in his pocket.

"Well, anyway, you've got through," he pronounced. "We can't expect to be infallible."

"We're right with the public now, and you'll be a little tin hero instead of a whipping-boy. We'll have to handle this inquest on Watkins pretty carefully, though. No need to say more than you've got to, Wilde, eh?"

"I shall tell the exact and literal truth," said the chief inspector, meeting his superior's glance steadily. "What I suspect—what I'm morally certain of—is not evidence. For between you and I, sir, there is no question that Thorold gave that man a chance to commit suicide."

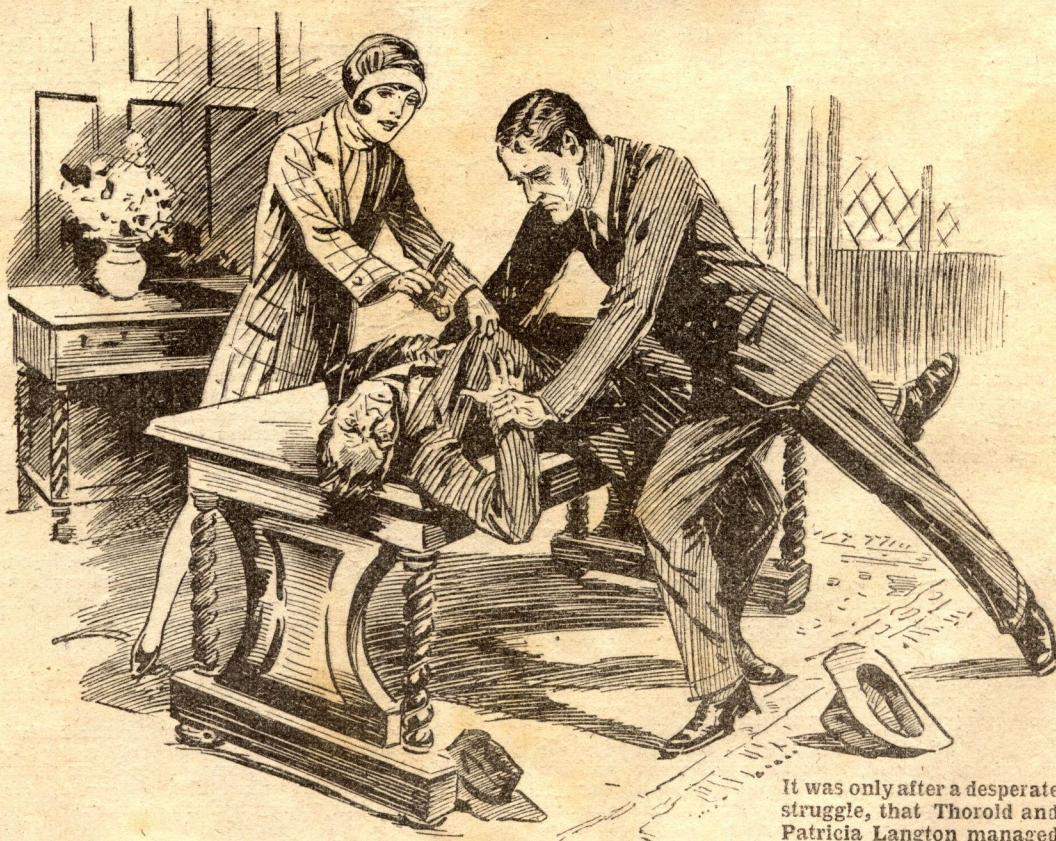
"Quite!" agreed Winter hastily. "Surmise isn't evidence. Anyway, it's no business of ours."

There was a tap at the door, and a clerk entered carrying a card. Wilde, rising, tapped out his pipe on the fender.

"It's our friends, sir. Would you like to see them here?"

Winter thought for a moment.

"Might be as well," he said. "Perhaps I can help to smooth 'em down. Let's give 'em a cup of tea."



It was only after a desperate struggle, that Thorold and Patricia Langton managed to force Watkins backwards across the table, and relieve him of his gun.

It was with the air of a man greeting a couple of long absent intimate friends that he greeted Miss Langton and Thorold.

"This is real sporting of you after the way we've treated you. Wilde and I have just been talking things over. We're in your debt in more than one way. Won't you sit down? I've rung for some tea."

Wilde, less effusive if equally genial, placed chairs and a man entered with the tea-tray.

When the clerk had departed the millionaire turned abruptly to Wilde. "Now, my lad," he said, briskly. "It's your deal. Pour us some tea, Pat, and let's hear Mr. Wilde say his little piece. You've got it all straightened out by now, I guess. That's where we amateurs fail. We got on to the Trapper, but we couldn't tuck in the ends of the job neatly. What have you done about Mrs. Watkins?"

The chief inspector took a quick gulp of tea. "I think it's plane sailing now," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't claim any particular brilliance in handling the case. You people were on the inside track practically all along. I was wrong—but it was only after I had gathered you in, Mr. Thorold, that it began to appear to me that I might be off the trail. There had been certain things that did not fit in, and it was to get over them that I adopted the hypothesis of a second Trapper."

"That was something near the truth!" exclaimed Miss Langton.

"It is the things which are near the truth, but are not the truth that bring about trouble," said Wilde. "Really, I first got a glimpse of the light yesterday morning when I reached Clarges Street. If Watkins had been content to burn the house down without any other elaboration I should probably have come to the conclusion that it was part of a plan by your friends to destroy any chance of picking up evidence against you. But when I learned that the charred bones were those of anatomical specimens, and that Mr. and Mrs. Watkins had vanished, I felt as if—as if—"

"As if someone had poured a bucket of cold water over you," suggested Thorold gravely.

"Thank you! That was something like the sensation. Up to then I had paid no particular attention to Watkins. He was simply a piece of the background. He had not impressed me. I had tried to pump him about you and had been rebuffed. By the way, he had led me to believe that he had reported my attempts to you."

"He did," said the millionaire dryly. "I commended him for his fidelity, and told him I would deal with you."

The chief inspector nodded.

"Well, this burning fake made me remember a lot of things. Here was a man not unlike you in general build, who was living in your house and was so far as I knew implicitly trusted. He might have been your accomplice, but that theory did not seem to me quite to fit. Why should he seek to make it appear that he was dead? When I questioned the other servants it began to seem more likely than ever that he was the real Simon Pure. I found that he had had extraordinary freedom in his comings and goings, and it was apparent that he had been absent from the house at vital times in the case."

"Also he had been heard to give expression to queer views which fitted with those I had myself heard the Trapper express. Combined with the attempt on Stella Cliffe, and a warning note that had been delivered at my lodgings by the Trapper in person—in neither of which events could you have had any hand—I found myself looking at the case from a fresh angle."

"But if Watkins was the Trapper, and you were entirely innocent, what was your game? That was not hard to decide after the hints you had given me, and which I now recalled."

You were trying to come the amateur detective stunt over me.

"The first thing was to pick up Watkins. Now, it is not so difficult to get on to a known person. When we started to look for the Trapper we were groping for unknown persons, and matters were complicated because of my conviction that you were the man. This was entirely different. Lots of our fellows had seen Watkins, and we had adequate descriptions of him which we could circulate. We found that he and his wife had picked up a taxi in Piccadilly a few minutes before the fire alarm was given. They had driven to King's Cross Station, and there dismissed the cab. From there they picked up another taxi to a small house in a street off the Upper Street, Islington. My men tracked them there, and in the way that sometimes happens they stumbled across three of Watkins' accomplices in the place. Two of them were fellows we had been looking for in another connection for some time—hold-up bandits of no particular brain-power but of a type that sticks at little. Handled by a man of Watkins' capacity, they were highly dangerous. The third was Paddy the Ghost. Our men were a little less surprised than they were, and grabbed 'em before it got to shooting. But the Watkins' had got away before our people reached the house, and we could dig nothing out of our prisoners."

"Tell me," said Thorold, "did you know all this before you released me?"

"Not all. Some," answered Wilde. "Well, as I say, we fairly lost sight of Watkins and his wife for the time. We, of course, had all the railway stations blocked and had given notice to our men at the ports. But it was at Croydon that we picked up the lady. She was disguised as an old woman and her passport photograph resembled her. Our men at the air station, however, noticed that the Foreign Office stamp looked queer. A little examination showed that the original photograph had been removed and another substituted, and a fake stamp impressed on it. The description had also been tampered with. So the woman was held, and in a little while she admitted her identity."

"There remained Watkins himself. He seemed to be entirely lost. I was the more concerned because in view of your attitude I wanted to jump in and clean up before you got a chance."

"I'm here to say that you almost did it," declared Thorold.

Wilde smilingly shook his head.

"Nearly but not quite. We were left in the air about Watkins. He might be anywhere. Then I thought of Miss Langton. We had been keeping an incidental eye on her and on you after your release, Mr. Thorold. I had an idea that the pair of you still had something up your sleeves. When I found that Miss Langton had engaged rooms at the Regal, I began to smell a rat. I put some men quietly to watch the hotel, and my suspicions were confirmed when I got an invitation from her. 'And friends' tacked on to my name looked as if trouble was expected. I myself arrived at the hotel a little early, but Watkins had already arrived. You spoilt my scheme, Mr. Thorold, by getting him the moment that he entered. I had intended to snatch him from under your nose. As it was I let affairs take your course, and you played out the comedy."

"Comedy—a trade term," explained Thorold, leaning towards Miss Langton.

The woman smiled.

"I think we may call honours easy, Mr. Wilde. What is going to happen now?"

"We're practically finished. It's up to a judge and jury now," said Wilde. "We shall put Mrs. Watkins on trial as an accessory, but the only real things we've got against her are that she spirited Stella away after the murder, and her part in the burning of the house in Clarges Street. She will probably plead that she acted under duress. Paddy will get what's

due to him. The other men will be tried for the raid on the Old Bailey, and we've got an individual account with each of them. I doubt if they'll worry us again for the next ten or fifteen years."

"And young Estrehan—what about him?" inquired Miss Langton.

"Look here," put in the millionaire. "I want to say a word about this. I'm the bird who's out of pocket over this show, and I'm entitled to a word. That twenty thousand that went back to this young fellow's employers was really mine. They would have to pay it all back to me if they prosecuted him for embezzlement?"

"Certainly," agreed Winter. "It's their loss however you look at it."

"And if I don't claim, they're not likely to stir in the matter."

"If you've got any notion of that sort," said Wilde acidly, "you'll forgive me for mentioning that it's the quixotic act of a fool. You've got no sort of responsibility."

"It's my money," retorted the other. "I shan't miss it, and I don't want that poor fish to go to prison. I've got one of those days when I feel like giving something away. I'd be mad enough to give you something, Wilde, if you'd let me."

"I'll not take advantage of your mood," said the chief inspector. "If you want to do anything there's always the Police Orphanage. Seriously, Mr. Thorold, I take it that you want us to let that young fool off." He turned to Winter. "I don't think he's anything but a fool, sir, and I've got no personal animosity for that business in Farringdon Street. He's been let in all round. If you think—"

The chief constable made a sweeping gesture across his desk.

"If you make a point of it, Mr. Thorold, we'll cut the lad out."

"You are a pair of delightful men," declared Miss Langton. "I put Quenton up to this. You see, I believe that something can be made of him and the girl. Quenton is willing to set them up in Canada and give them a chance."

Winter and Wilde exchanged amused glances.

"Wish I'd been born a crook," muttered the latter. "Anyway, our Dominion friends will get some experience when she's educated Estrehan."

Thorold patted him familiarly on the back.

"Don't be a cheap cynic, Wilde. You know you're really glad. Now let's get down to business. Do you know of anyone who wants to take over a well-established, efficient type-writing business? Pat is retiring." He broke off into a snatch of song and attempted to dance with the burly detective about the room.

"So join in a measure expressive of pleasure, For I'm to be married to-day, to-day, Yes, I'm to be married to-day."

"Not exactly to-day, but next week. No fuss. Just a quiet registry-office business. I want you both to come, and Wilde, I'm going to expose the truth of my feelings about you. You'll be my best man."

He thrust out a hand, and the chief inspector gripped it.

"Sure. Nothing I'd like better," he grinned. "And say I'm a poor man, but I might run to a pair of silver handcuffs as a wedding present."

THE END.

(Do not upon any account miss the long opening instalment of the powerful new serial in next week's issue of THE THRILLER.)

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