

# *THE* THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

2d!



*The*  
**HOUSE** on the **MOORS**  
LONG COMPLETE  
MYSTERY NOVEL by *Leslie Charteris*

# The House



Even as the grim twisted figure raised his gun, there came a sound at the door. There, in the dark entrance, stood the stalwart figure of a police constable.

## Chapter 1. MYSTERY.

By now, the name of the Five Kings was almost universal. It was estimated (by those industrious gentlemen who estimate these things) that if all the columns that the newspapers had devoted to the Five Kings and their campaign against crookdom and the righting of wrongs were placed end to end, they would reach from the south-east corner of the Woolworth Building, New York, to a point seventeen inches west of the commissionaire outside the Berkeley Street entrance of the May Fair Hotel, London—which, as was remarked at the time, only goes to prove that the bridging of the gulf between rich and poor can be materially helped by the industrious efforts of a democratic Press.

The Big Five—Mr. Archibald Sheridan (the King of Diamonds), Mr. Richard Carey Tremayne (the King of Hearts), Mr. Leonard Foinette Crockford (the King of Clubs), and even the Joker himself, Mr. Simon Templar, whom many knew as the Saint, did not lack publicity.

The other was Mr. Norman Kent (the King of Spades), but, unfortunately, Norman Kent went to his death one quiet evening, and in so doing made possible one of the greatest things that the Five Kings ever accomplished.

They, then—they fulfilled much of their inspiration, these Five Kings. They made their name to be feared by bad men as far as their reputation spread over the world. Nothing was too big for them to tackle; no extreme was too fantastic to turn them aside from the single aim of achieving their end.

And this was so until the day when Norman Kent died, and those who were left—Leonard Crockford and the Saint—were forced to take refuge abroad with Dicky Tremayne, who was already there, as has been related. At that time the police were as near as they ever came to tearing away the veil of mystery with which the Five had so successfully shrouded their activities, and the Five cheerfully sacrificed that much for the attainment of their purpose. And then the Saint learned the reason of Norman Kent's death—and came back to London.

"Norman didn't run away," he said. "Have we any right to quit after he's given his life to show us how a man can stand his ground?"

Therefore the Saint came back; and with him came Leonard Crockford, Dicky Tremayne, and Patricia Holm, the Joker's weakness.

They flew over from France in the Saint's Blue Bird, and came by a devious route to the Saint's flat in Brook Street.

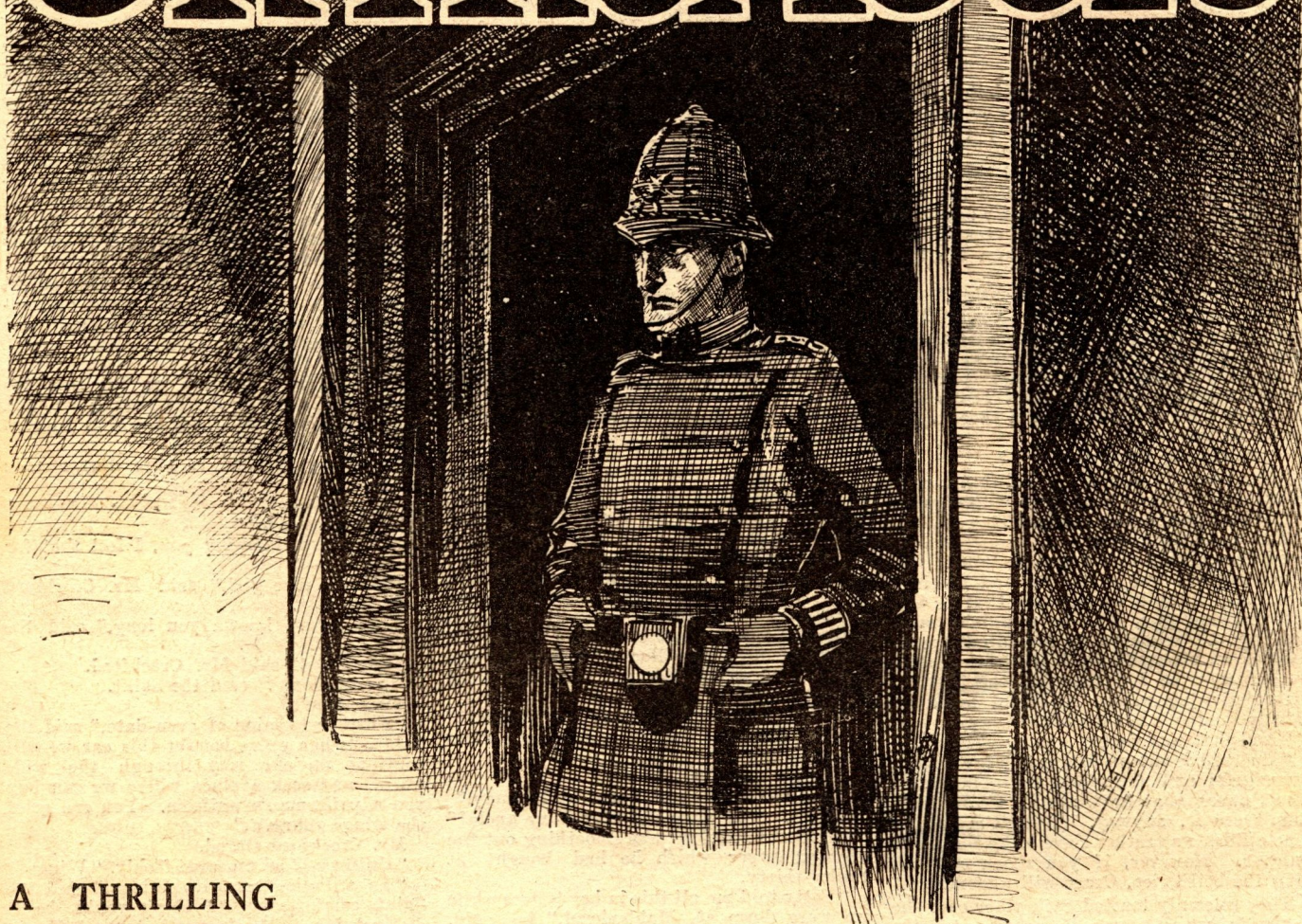
The detectives who had discovered the flat in Brook Street some weeks before had searched it thoroughly, as was their duty. They had found nothing, but the traces of their passage were everywhere visible.

"They might have tidied the place up after them," remarked the Saint mildly, standing at gaze before the disorder.

Orace, the Saint's devoted servant, ran his thumb through the accumulated dust on the mantelpiece, and made strangled, snuffing noises of disgust.

He was still struggling ferociously with the mess when they went to bed that night.

# On The Moors



A THRILLING  
COMPLETE  
NOVEL FEATUR-  
ING THE FIVE  
KINGS.

*By Leslie Charteris*

The Saint, wandering towards his bath the next morning, caught through an open door a glimpse of a sitting-room become magically clean and ship-shape, and was moved to investigate further. Eventually he came upon Orace frying eggs in the kitchen.

"I see you've been spring-cleaning," he said.

"Yus," said Orace savagely. "Brekfuss narf a minnit."

"Good scout," drawled the Saint, and drifted on.

The Saint refused to behave like a hunted man. He went out and about his lawful occasions, and in consequence it was five days before the police noticed his return. There are times when barefaced effrontery is the most impenetrable disguise.

But it could not last. There are constables, and they patrol beats, and not the least of their duties is to embody in their reports an account of anything unusual

they may notice. There was a night when the Saint, looking out from behind his curtains, saw two men in bowler hats staring up long and earnestly at the lighted windows which should have been in deserted darkness; and then he knew that it would not be long before the Law reached out an inquiring hand towards him. But he said nothing at the time.

Leonard Crockford came in at lunch-time the following afternoon to find the Saint still in his dressing-gown. Simon Templar was smoking a thin cigar, and Leonard knew at once, from the Saintliness of his expression, that something had happened.

"Teal's been here," said Leonard, after a hawk-eyed glance round the room.

"Claude Eustace himself," murmured the Saint admiringly. "How did you guess?"

"There's a discarded piece of chewing-gum in that ash-tray, and that scrap of pink paper in the fireplace must once have encased the piece he went out with. Giving

my well-known impersonation of Sherlock Holmes—"

Simon nodded.

"You look dangerously like developing an intelligence, my Dogface. Yes, Teal has called. I knew he was coming, because he told me so himself."

"Liar!" said Mr. Crockford pleasantly.

"He told me over the telephone," said the Saint calmly. "I rang him up and asked him, and he told me."

"He didn't!"

"He did. I said I was Barney Malone, of the 'Clarion,' and I told him we'd heard a rumour that the Five Kings had been seen in London, and asked him if he could say anything about it. 'Not yet,' says Teal, who's pally with Barney, 'but I'm going to see about it this morning. Come down after lunch and get the story.' 'Right,' I said. And there we were."

"You have a nerve, Mr. Templar."

"Not so bad, Mr. Crockford. I then proceeded to ring up my solicitors, and Uncle Elias whiffled round and held my hand while we waited for the Law, which arrived about eleven-thirty. There was some argument, and then Teal went home. I hope he doesn't wait too long for Barney," added the Saint piously.

Leonard Crockford sat down and searched for cigarettes.

"He went like a lamb?"

"Like a lamb. In all our exploits, except the last, his case depended on the evidence of the injured parties—and none of the said I.P.'s seem anxious to prosecute. Norman Kent was the man who arranged the decease of Chastel, and Norman was also the man who killed Vargan—and Norman's dead. Of course, they might fix us as accomplices, but Uncle Elias and I made him see that his chance wasn't too hopeful."

"We destroyed Vargan's invention."

"The act of a pacifist," says Uncle Elias, and quotes a string of test cases a mile long. Vargan himself is the only man who could have kicked about that, and Vargan's beyond kicking. No—it wasn't Teal's day. Of course, we *did* once have a short fight, which he lost—"

"Assaulting the police—"

"But Uncle Elias and I called that a mere detail, and softened Teal down with cigars."

"So you parted like brothers?"

The Saint shrugged.

"I should call it an armed truce. He asked me if I was going on, and I said I was. And I think we may say that he told me, unofficial-like, that he wouldn't mind putting the telescope to his blind eye as long as we behaved ourselves within reason. I said we'd be so good that the light of virtue glowing within us would make us faintly luminous in the dark."

"And that was that?"

"He sailed out on his note of warning, very grim and stern and law-abiding. I won't swear that he winked. Uncle Elias didn't see it, anyway. But I'm afraid Uncle Elias was rather shocked by the whole palaver. However, if you reach out and ring the bell twice, Orace will understand."

They solemnly toasted each other over the tankards which came in answer to the summons; and then Leonard Crockford spoke.

"There's a problem which might interest us—"

"Professionally?"

"It's quite possible. It starts with a girl I met in Torquay last summer."

Simon sighed.

"You insist on meeting girls in these outlandish places," he complained. "Now, if you'd only met her in Gotham, for instance, I should have had a song all ready for you. When you came in, I was just perfecting a little song about a wild woman of Gotham who made love to young men and then shot 'em—till she started to shoot at a hard-hearted brute who just grabbed her and walloped her for all he was worth. But don't let that cramp your style. You were saying?"

"This girl I met in Torquay."

"Did she think you were a good type to love?"

"My dear Mr. Templar—"

"I was recalling," said the Saint impatiently, "another girl in Torquay who thought she'd claimed you for a husband. She clung to this view till she chanced to meet you. Oh, send back my bonny to me! But you were telling me about someone else."

"She has an uncle—"

"Impossible!"

"She has an uncle, and she lives with the

uncle, and the uncle has a house at Newton."

"They have an abbot there, haven't they?"

"Newton Abbot is the place. The uncle built this house nearly seven years ago. He intended to settle down there and spend the rest of his life in peace—and now a man insists on buying the place."

"Insists?"

"It comes to something like that. This man—"

"Let's have it clear, sonny boy. What's uncle's name?"

"Sebastian Bonas."

"Then he must be rich."

"He's happy."

"And Whiskers—the bloke who wants to buy the house?"

"We don't know his name. He sent his secretary, an oily excrescence called Gilbert Neave."

The Saint settled deeper in his armchair.

"And the story?" he prompted.

"There's very little of it—or there was until to-day. Uncle refused to sell. Neave bid more and more—he went up to twenty thousand pounds, I believe—and he was so insistent that finally uncle lost his temper and kicked him out."

"And?"

"Three days later uncle was pottering about the garden when his hat flew off. When he picked it up there was a bullet hole through it. A week later he was out in his car and the steering came unstuck. He'd have been killed if he'd been driving fast. A week after that everybody in the house was mysteriously taken ill, and the analysts found arsenic in the milk. A couple of days later Neave 'phoned up and asked if uncle had changed his mind about selling."

"Uncle Sebastian still gave him the razz?"

"Betty says he fused the telephone wires for miles around."

"Who's Betty?"

"His niece—the girl I met in Torquay."

"I see. And when did they bury uncle?"

Leonard Crockford was smoothing out the evening paper which he had bought at twelve-thirty.

"Betty told me all this in her letters while we were down at Maidenhead," he said. "Now you can read the sequel."

Simon took the paper.

Leonard indicated the column, but that was hardly necessary. There was one heading that caught the eye—that could not have helped being the first thing to catch the eye of a man like the Saint. For by that single title an inspired sub-editor had made a sensation out of a simple mystery.

"The Policeman With Wings," said the heading; and the point of the story was that a policeman had called on a certain Mr. Sebastian Bonas three days before—a perfectly ordinary and wingless policeman, according to the testimony of the house-keeper who admitted him, but a most unusual policeman according to the testimony of subsequent events. For, after a short interview, Mr. Bonas had left his house with the policeman in his car, saying that he would be back to lunch; but neither the policeman nor Mr. Bonas had been heard of since, and the police of all the surrounding districts, appealed to, declared that none of their policemen was missing, and certainly none had been sent to see Mr. Bonas.

"I observe," said the Saint thoughtfully, "that Miss Bonas was in Ostend at the time, and has just returned upon hearing of her uncle's disappearance. So the paper says."

"She told me she was going to Ostend for a week in August to stay with friends. Have you any ideas?"

"Millions," said the Saint.

The door opened, and a head came in.

"Lunch narf a minnit," said the head, and went out again.

The Saint rose.

"Millions of ideas, Dogface, old dear," he murmured. "But none of them, at the moment, tells me why anyone should be so absorbingly interested in one particular house at Newton Abbot. On the other hand, if you like to sing softly to me while I dress, I may produce something brilliant over the cocktail you will be shaking up while you sing."

He vanished, and was back again in an amazingly short space of time to collect the Martini which Mr. Crockford was decanting from the shaker as Orace came in with the soup. The Saint's speed of dressing was an unending source of envious admiration to his friends.

"We are interested," said the Saint, holding his glass up to the light and inspecting it with an appreciative eye, "and we have produced a brilliant idea."

"What's that?"

"After lunch, we will go out into the wide world and buy a nice-looking car, and in the car we will travel down to Newton Abbot this very afternoon."

"Arriving in time to have dinner with Betty."

"If you insist."

"Any objection?"

"Only that, knowing you, I feel that for her sake—"

"She's a nice girl," said Mr. Crockford reminiscently.

"She hasn't known you long," said the Saint.

"Cheer-ho!" said Mr. Crockford.

"Honk, honk!" said the Saint.

They drank.

"Further to mine of even date," said the Saint, "when we've bought this car we will continue on our way through the wide world, and seek a place where we can buy you a policeman's uniform. You can grow the wings yourself."

Mr. Crockford stared.

"Uniform?" he repeated feebly. "Wings?"

"As a Policeman with Wings," said the Saint comfortably, "I think you'd be a distinct hit. That's part of my brilliant idea."

And the Saint grinned, hands on hips, tall and fresh and immaculate in grey. His dark hair was at its sleekest perfection, his clear blue eyes danced, his brown face was alight with an absurdly boyish enthusiasm.

The Saint in those days had moods in which he was unwontedly sober. He was then nearly twenty-eight, and in those twenty-eight years of his life he had seen more than most men would see in eighty years, and done more than they would have done in a hundred and eighty. And the passing of his friend, Norman Kent, the King of Spades, had left its mark.

But this was not so much a dulling of his impetuous energy as the acquiring of a more solid foundation for it.

He remained the Saint—the flippant dandy with the heart of a crusader, the fighter who laughed as he fought, the reckless, smiling swashbuckler, the inspired and beloved leader of men, the man born with the sound of trumpets in his ears. And the others followed him.

He was impatient through that lunch, but he made the meal. And after it he lighted a cigarette and set it canting up between smiling lips, and leapt to his feet as if he could contain himself no longer.

"Let's go!" cried the Saint.

He clapped Leonard Crockford on the shoulder, and so they went out arm-in-arm. Leonard Crockford would have followed in

the same spirit if the Saint had announced that their objective was the Senate House, Timbuctoo.

Why should I apologise for giving to the world the further adventures of such a man?

Thus the Five Kings came back to England.

#### MISSING.

**I**f Simon Templar had been a failure, he would have been spoken of pityingly as a man born out of his time. The truth was that in all the fields of modern endeavour—except the crazy driving of high-powered cars, the suicidal stunting of aeroplanes, and the slick handling of boxing gloves—the Saint was cheerfully useless. Golf bored him. He played tennis with vigour and shameless inefficiency, erratically scrambling through weeks of rabbitry to occasional flashes of positively Tildenesque *maestria*.

He was always ready to make his duck or bowl his wickets in any cricket game that happened to be going; and his prowess at baseball, on an expedition which he once made to America, brought tears to the eyes of all beholders.

But put a fencing foil in Simon Templar's hand; throw him into dangerous swimming water; invite him to slither up a tree or the side of a house; set him on the wildest horse that ever bucked; ask him to throw a knife into a visiting-card or shoot the three leaves out of an ace of clubs at twenty paces; suggest that he couldn't put an arrow through a green-gage held between your finger and thumb at the same range—and then you'd see something to tell your grandchildren.

Of course he was born out of his time. He ought to have lived in any age but the present—any age in which his uncanny flair for all such medieval accomplishments would have brought him to the front of his fellows.

And yet you didn't notice the anachronism, because he wasn't a failure. He made for himself a world fit for himself to live in.

It is truly said that adventures are to the adventurous. Simon had about him that indefinable atmosphere of romance and adventurousness which is given to some favoured men in every age, and it attracted adventure as inevitably as a magnet attracts iron filings.

But it will be left for future generations to decide how much of the adventure which he found was made by himself. For adventure can only be born of the conflict of two adventurous men; the greatest adventurer would be baffled if he came into conflict with a dullard, and a dullard would find no adventure in meeting the greatest adventurer that ever stepped.

The Saint found the seeds of adventure everywhere around him. It was the Saint himself who saw the budding of the seed before anyone else would have noticed it and who brought the thing to a full flowering glory with the loving care of a fanatic.

With a typical genius the Saint had already touched the story of the Policeman with Wings.

"A mug," said the Saint kindly, as he pushed the Desurio towards Devonshire with the speedometer needle off the map, "a mug such as yourself, for instance, my beautiful, wouldn't have thought of anything like that."

"He wouldn't," agreed Leonard fervently, as the Saint shot the Desurio between two cars with the width of a match-box to spare on either side.

"A mug," said the Saint kindly, "would have thought that it was quite sufficient either (a) to remove Betty to the compara-

tive safety of his maiden aunt's home at Stratford—"

"Upon the Avon."

"Upon the Avon—or (b) to entrench ourselves in uncle's house at Newton and prepare to hold the place against the enemy."

"A mug such as myself would have thought that," confessed Leonard humbly.

The Saint paused for a moment to slide contemptuously past a Packard that was crawling along at sixty.

"But that mug's scheme," said the Saint, "wouldn't get us any forrarder. I grant you that if we watched vigilantly and shot straight we might very well frustrate the invading efforts of the enemy for as long as we stayed in residence—which, if Betty is all you say she is, might keep us busy for weeks. But we still shouldn't know who is the power behind Mr. Neave—if it isn't Mr. Neave himself."

"Whereas you suggest—"

"That we carry the war into the enemy's camp. Consider the position of the power behind Mr. Neave, whom we'll call

to the bishop," he murmured. "This brain of yours is becoming absolutely phenomenal. Now go ahead and invent the details of this trap we're going to lead Whiskers into, because I've thought enough for one day, and I'm tired."

And the Saint languidly settled down to concentrate on the business of annihilating space; what time Mr. Crockford, after a few prayers, closed his eyes and proceeded with the train of thought which the Saint had initiated.

They broke the journey at Shaftesbury for liquid nourishment, and when they came out Mr. Crockford approached the car unhappily. But he was always tactful.

"Shall I take a turn at the wheel?" he ventured.

"Yes," said the Saint, "Detective-Inspector Teal's been here. He'd discovered something and wanted to arrest me."



Whiskers for short. Consider the position of Whiskers. There he's been and gone and thought out the charming scheme of abducting people by means of a fake policeman—a notable idea. No one ever suspects a policeman. I'll bet that the fake policeman simply said they'd arrested a man whom they suspected of having something to do with the doping of milk, and would Mr. Bonas come over to the station and see if the accused looked anything like Neave. And uncle was removed without any of the fuss and bother you have when you kidnap people by force."

"You suggest that we run a policeman of our own?"

"Obviously. Think of the publicity. A few days after the abduction of uncle, the niece also disappears with a mysterious policeman. I'm afraid that'll make Betty out to be rather a dull sort, but we can't help that. The fact remains that Whiskers, in his secret lair, will read of the leaf that's been taken out of his book, will wonder who's got on to his game, and will promptly arm himself to the teeth and set out to find and strafe us."

"And we will help him by leaving a trail of clues leading straight into a trap."

The Saint sighed.

"You're getting on—as the actress said

"I'm not tired," said the Saint breezily. "You said just now you were too tired to think."

"I don't think when I'm driving," said the Saint.

Leonard would have liked to say that he could very well believe it, but he thought of the retort too late.

They covered the next eighty-five miles in a shade under two hours, and ran up the drive of the house to which Leonard pointed the way as the clocks were striking seven-thirty.

"It occurs to me," said Simon, as he applied the brakes, "that we ought to have sent a wire to announce ourselves. Does the girl know you're in England at all?"

Leonard shook his head.

"I hadn't told her we were back."

The Saint climbed out and stretched himself, and they walked up to the house together.

A face watched them from a ground floor window, and before they had reached the steps the window was flung up and a voice spoke sharply and suspiciously:

"I'm sorry—Miss Bonas is out."

The Saint stopped.

"Where's she gone?"

"She was going to the police-station."

Simon groaned.

"Not with a policeman?" he protested.

"Yes, she went with a policeman," said the woman. "But this one was all right. Miss Bonas rang up the police-station to make sure. They've found Mr. Bonas."

"Is he alive?" asked Leonard.

"Yes, he's alive."

The Saint was staring up intently into the sky, revolving slowly on his heels, as though following a trail in the clouds.

"Somehow," he said gently, "that's more than I can believe."

Crockford said:

"She telephoned the station——"

"Yes," said the Saint, "she telephoned."

By that time he had turned right round.

"Which," he said, "is exactly what any strategist would expect an intelligent girl to do, in the circumstances."

"But——"

The Saint's arm went out suddenly like a signpost.

"The telephone wire goes over those fields. And the line's cut by that group of trees over there, unless I'm mistaken. A man sitting there with an instrument——"

"My—hat!" snapped Leonard, with surprising restraint.

But Simon was already on his way back to the car.

"How long ago did she leave?" he flung at the now frightened housekeeper.

"Not five minutes ago, sir, when I was just starting to serve dinner. She took her car——"

"Which way?"

The woman pointed.

The Saint let in the clutch as Leonard swung into the place beside him.

"What's the betting, Leonard?" he crisped. "If they'd gone towards Exeter, we'd have seen them. Therefore——"

"They've gone towards Bovey Tracey—unless they turned off towards Ashburton——"

The Saint stopped the car again so abruptly that Leonard was almost lifted out of his seat.

"You can drive this car. You know the district backwards, and I don't. Take any chance you like, and never mind the damage. I'll bet they've gone towards Ashburton and Two Bridges. You can disappear on Dartmoor as well as anywhere in England——"

Leonard was behind the wheel by the time Simon had reached the other side of the car. He was moving off as the Saint leapt for the running-board.

And then the Saint was lighting two cigarettes with perfect calm—one for Leonard and one for himself.

"Nice of Whiskers," said the Saint, with that irresponsible optimism which nothing could ever damp. "He's done all the work for us, provided the policeman and everything. When I think of the money I spent on that outfit of yours——"

"If we catch him," said Crockford hunched intently over the steering-wheel, "you'll be able to talk."

"We'll catch him," said the Saint.

If Simon Templar was a reckless driver, Leonard could match him when the occasion arose. And, more valuable even than mere speed, Leonard knew every inch of the road blindfolded. He sent the Desurio literally leaping over the macadam, cornering on two wheels without losing control for an instant, and cleaving a path through the other traffic without regard for anyone's nerves; but nerves were things which the Saint only knew by name.

"It's extraordinary how things happen to us," drawled the Saint coolly, as the Desurio grazed out of what looked to be

the certainty of a head-on collision. "Perpetual melodrama—that's what we live in. Why will nobody let me live the quiet life I yearn for?"

Leonard said nothing. He knew exactly why his life wasn't quiet. It was because he happened to be a friend of Simon Templar's, and Simon Templar was a man who couldn't help spreading melodrama all around him like an infectious disease.

#### THRILLS.

**B**UT the Saint did not feel at all guilty about the adventure. He could not have seen, if the suggestion had been made to him, how he could possibly be blamed for any incidental melodrama therein involved. The girl was Leonard's, the story so far had been Leonard's, and the romantic rewards, if any, would be Leonard's—therefore the whole shout was Leonard's.

Anyhow, the Saint was quite happy. He leaned back with half-closed eyes, enjoying his cigarette. Simon Templar had the gift of being able to relax instantaneously, and thereby being able to benefit to the full from the intervals of relative quiet between moments of crisis; and then, when the next crisis cropped up, he could snap back to a quivering steel-spring alertness without the loss of a second. That, he said, was the way he stayed young—by refusing to take anything quite as seriously as he should have done.

As a matter of fact, he was elaborating a really brilliant idea for a new story

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**NYDSEY LOHRER**

*This is a chaotic. Can you  
solve the puzzle of these  
misplaced letters. The  
answer appears on page 752.*

about a giraffe when Leonard Crockford rapped out:

"There's a car in front!"

"No!" demurred the Saint dreamily.

"Are we going to hit it?"

But his eyes were wide open, and he saw the car at once—on the crest of the next switchback.

"What kind of car?"

"A Morris—and Betty's is a Morris. A man was driving, with a girl beside him, but he was wearing an ordinary soft hat——"

"Dear old ass," said the Saint, "naturally he'd have an ordinary coat on under his tunic, and a soft hat in his pocket, ready to transform himself on the first quiet piece of road. Policemen driving cars in uniform are so darn conspicuous. He might easily be our man. Step on it, son!"

"Hang it," said Leonard, "the accelerator won't go down any further—unless I push it through the floor."

"Then push it through the floor," instructed the Saint helpfully, and lighted another cigarette.

The car in front was out of sight then, but Leonard was slamming the Desurio at the immediate slope with all the force of its fifty developed horses. Half a minute later they topped the rise and went bucketing down the subsequent slant in a roar and whistle of wind. They hurtled through the dip and slashed into the opposite grade with a deep-throated snarl.

"In England," remarked the Saint mildly, as a proposition of philosophical interest, "there is a speed limit of twenty miles an hour."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Then I hope it keeps fine for them."

"Kind of you," drawled the Saint.

"Kind of you, Mr. Crockford!"

The Desurio ate up the hill, zoomed round the bend at the top. There was a breath-taking second in which, by a miracle that no one will ever be able to explain, they escaped being sandwiched to death between two motor-coaches moving in opposite directions; then they skimmed round the next corner into the temporary safety of a straight stretch of road on which, for the moment, there was only the Desurio and the Morris in front—a quarter of a mile away.

The Desurio devoured the intervening distance like a hungry beast.

"I can see the number!" came Leonard's voice like the crack of a whip. "It's Betty's car——"

"O.K., Big Boy!"

But it never occurred to the Saint to abandon his half-smoked cigarette.

Another corner, taken at death-defying pace, and then another straight stretch with the Morris only thirty yards in the lead.

The Klaxon blared under Leonard's hand, and the man in front signalled them to pass.

"Slacken up as you come level," ordered the Saint. "I'll board the galleon. Ready?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll go!"

The Saint had the door on his side of the car open in a flash. He slipped out on to the running-board and rode there, closing the door carefully behind him as the nose of the Desurio slid past the rear wing of the Morris. And he was serenely finishing off his cigarette.

On these occasions, the Saint's sang-froid would have made an ice-box look like an overheated gas oven.

Then the driver of the Morris saw him in the mirror and crowded on speed. The Saint saw the man's hand leave the wheel and dive for his pocket.

"Drop behind as soon as I'm aboard!" rapped the Saint. "Now!"

The Desurio came abreast, slackened, hung there.

For a second the two cars raced side by side, with a bare foot of space between them, at fifty miles an hour; and the Saint stepped across to the running-board of the Morris as one might step across a garden path.

The Desurio fell astern instantly with a scream of overworked brakes. It was scarcely too soon, for the Morris swerved drunkenly across the road as the Saint struck twice.

The driver sagged sideways, and the gun slipped through his fingers and thumped to the floor.

Simon straightened the car up with a steady hand. They were losing speed

rapidly, for the driver's foot had come off the accelerator when he collapsed under the Saint's two crashing blows to the jaw, otherwise they would never have been able to take the next corner.

Round the corner, twenty yards away, a lane opened off the main road. The Saint signalled the turn, and then, reaching over, used the hand brake and spun the wheel. They ran a little way down the lane and stopped; and Leonard brought the Desurio to rest behind them.

Through all that violent and hair-raising action the girl had never stirred. Her eyes were closed as if in sleep. The Saint looked at her thoughtfully, and thoughtfully felt in the pockets of the unconscious driver.

Leonard was shaking her and calling her name helplessly. He looked up at the Saint.

"They've doped her——"

"Yes," said the Saint, thoughtfully examining a little glass hypodermic syringe that was still half-filled with a pale straw-coloured liquid, "they've certainly doped her."

In the same thoughtful way he lifted the driver's right arm, turned back the sleeve, drove the needle into the exposed flesh and pressed home the plunger. The empty syringe went into a convenient ditch.

"I think, Leonard," said the Saint, "we will now move with some speed. Get your bag out of the car and unload the police effects. I want to see you in those glad rags."

"But where are we going?"

"I'll think while you're changing. The one safe bet is that we've got to go at once. The housekeeper bird will be spreading the alarm already, and we've got to get away before the roads are stopped. Jump to it, my beautiful cherub!"

The Saint sometimes said that Leonard was too good-looking to be really intelligent; but there were times when Leonard could get off the mark with commendable promptness, and this was one of them.

While Leonard was rustling into his uniform, the Saint picked the driver out of the Morris, carried him over, and dumped him into the back of the Desurio.

"We'll do some third degree on him later," said the Saint. "If he recovers," he added carelessly.

"Which way can we go?" asked Crookford. "It wouldn't be safe to go back through Newton, and we can't head out into the blue towards Land's End."

"Why not?" drawled the Saint, who was apt to become difficult on the slightest provocation. "Land's End sounds a good romantic place to establish a piratical base, and we must have one somewhere. Besides, it has the great advantage that nobody's ever used it before. The only alternative is to make for Tavistock and Okehampton, and either take the north coast road through Barnstaple and Minehead, or chance going through Exeter."

"I thought you wanted to be seen."

"I do—but somewhere where they can't stop us. They can see us go through any village, but they can hold us up in Exeter—it's a slow place to get through at the best of times."

"You may be right. There's nowhere for us to go if we do head east. Unless we make back for Brook Street."

"Brook Street would be the only place."

Now, the Saint had once had a bungalow on the Thames at Maidenhead; but that was where Norman Kent had died.

"Teal knows about Brook Street," said the Saint. "He's liable to drop in there any time. Your maiden aunt at Stratford-upon-the-Avon——"



Without the slightest warning the old man's hat was torn from his head, a round bullet hole drilled clean through the crown.

"You don't know her," snorted Leonard, testing the fit of his helmet.

"I can imagine it," said the Saint. "No—we'll spare the feelings of auntie. I can understand her getting rather excited when Whiskers tools up with his gang to recapture the hostage."

Leonard picked up his discarded clothes and took them over to the Morris, and the Saint walked beside him. A barren waste of moorland stretched around them, and a hump of ground capped with gorse screened them from the main road.

"Then where can we go? Remember that anything that Whiskers gets to know through the papers will be known to the real police first. We've overlooked that."

"Yes, we've overlooked that," said the Saint thoughtfully; and he paused, with one foot propped up on the running-board of the Morris and his hands deep in his trouser pockets and his eyes fixed on the girl in a blank and distracted way. "We've overlooked that," he said.

"Well?"

Leonard asked the question as if he had no hope of receiving a useful answer, yet it seemed quite natural to ask it. People naturally asked such impossible questions of the Saint.

Half an hour ago (Leonard knew it was half an hour because the Saint had smoked two cigarettes, and the Saint consumed four cigarettes an hour with the regularity of clockwork) they had calmly driven up to a house in Newton Abbot in the expectation of dinner, a short convivial evening, a bath, and a well-earned night's rest before proceeding with the problem in hand.

Now—it seemed only five minutes later—they had risked their necks a dozen times in a hectic motor chase, stopped the fugitive car, laid out the driver, doped him with his own medicine, and found themselves saddled with two bodies and the necessity for putting their plans forward by twenty-four hours.

And Simon Templar was quite unperturbed, and apparently unaware that there was, or had been, any excitement whatever.

"On the other hand," said the Saint thoughtfully, still looking at the girl, "we might revise our strategy slightly.

There's one place in the whole of England where the police will never think of looking for anybody."

"Where's that?"

"That," said the Saint, "is Uncle Sebastian's house."

Leonard was beyond being startled by anything the Saint suggested. Besides, he was swift on the uptake.

"You mean we should go there now?"

"No less."

"But the housekeeper——"

"The housekeeper, with her heart full of the fear of winged policemen, and her boots full of feet, will have shut up the house and fled to the bosom of her family at Torquay—or wherever her family keeps its official bosom. We navigate first to a pub I wot of in St. Marychurch, to demand liquor and provisions."

"Not in these trousers," said Leonard, indicating his costume.

"In those trousers," said the Saint, "but not in that coat and hat. You'd better stick to as much of the outfit

as you can, to save time, because you'll want it later in the evening. Speed, my angel, is the order of the night. The great brain is working——"

Leonard, feeling somewhat dazed, but still on the spot, was starting to peel off his tunic. The Saint helped him on with his gent's jacket.

"I'll think out the further details on the way," he said. "I've got another colossal idea which won't work unless we get the dope bird to a quiet place before he comes to. I'll take the Desurio and the dope bird, and you take the Morris and the girl—and let's burn the road!"

He spoke the last words from his way back to the Desurio, and he was already reversing up the lane as Leonard tipped his police lid into the dickey and climbed into the driving seat of the Morris.

As Leonard backed round into the main road, the Desurio slid past him, and the Saint leaned out.

"She's a nice girl, by appearances," said the Saint. "Mind you keep both eyes on the road all the way home, sonny boy!"

Then he was gone, with a gay wave of his hand, and Leonard pulled out the Morris after him.

It was still daylight, for the month was August. The rays of the sun slanted softly across the purple moor; overhead, a shadow on a pale blue sky, a curlew flew towards the sunset with a weird titter; the evening air went to Leonard's head like wine.

Leonard had got into his stride.

He should have been concentrating exclusively on the task of keeping on the trail of the Desurio; but he was not. With both hands clinging religiously to the steering-wheel, he stole a sidelong glance at the girl. With one hand clinging religiously to the steering-wheel, he reached out the other and tugged off her small hat—in order, he told himself, that the rush of cool air might help to revive her.

Black hair, straight and sleek, framing a face that was all wrong. Eccentric eyes, an absurd nose, a ridiculous mouth—all about as wrong as they could be. But a perfect skin. She must have been tall. "No nonsense with tall girls," thought Leonard, as an expert.

"But," thought Leonard, as an expert.

"she's a darn nice girl, and mine, if I make no mistake."

The pub at St. Marychurch which both he and the Saint wotted of, where a friendly proprietor would not ask too many questions. The removal of the "dope bird" to a quiet cellar where a ruthless interrogation could proceed without interruption. The development of the Saint's unrevealed stratagem. Then, perhaps—

#### THE NEXT MOVE.

**D**RIVING straight into the garage of the Links Hotel, St. Marychurch, Crockford found the Saint's Desurio there before him. The Saint was not there, but the "dope bird" remained, in the back of the car in unprotesting tenancy. His mouth was open, and he appeared to snore with distressing violence.

Leonard picked the girl out of the Morris and carried her through a back entrance to the hotel adjoining the garage. He was unobserved, for the population was at dinner. Finding an empty lounge, he put the girl down in an armchair and went on his way. There was no one to question his right to leave stray, unconscious girls lying about the place, for Leonard himself happened to be the proprietor of the pub in his spare time.

He continued down the corridor to the hall, and there found Simon Templar interviewing the manageress.

"It has been," the Saint was saying, staggering rhythmically, "a b-beautiful b-binge. Champagne. An' brandy. An' beer. Barrels an' barrels of it." He giggled inanely, and flung out his arms in a wide sweep to indicate the size of the barrels. "Barrels," he said. "An' we won't go home till the morning, we won't go home till the mor-hor-ning—"

He caught sight of Leonard, and pointed to him with one hand while he grasped the hand of the manageress passionately with the other.

"An' there's dear ole Leonard!" he crowed. "You ask dear ole Leonard if it wasn't a b-beautiful b-binge. 'Cos we won't go home till the morning, we won't go home—"

"I'm afraid," said Leonard, advancing with solemn disapproval written all over his face, "that my friend is rather drunk."

The Saint wagged a wobbly forefinger at him.

"Drunk?" he expostulated, with por-

tentious gravity. "Leonard, ole darling, that's unkind—frightfully unkind. Now, if you'd said that about Desmond—poor ole Dismal Desmond—he's passed right out. I left him in the car. An' he won't go home till the morning, he won't—"

The shocked manageress drew Leonard to one side.

"We can't let him in like that, Mr. Crockford," she protested, twittering. "There are guests staying in the hotel—"

"Are there any rooms vacant?" asked Leonard.

"None at all. And people will be coming out from dinner in a minute—"

"But," carolled the Saint unmelodiously, "we won't go home till the mor-hor-ning— an' so say all of us. Gimme a drink."

The manageress looked helplessly about her.

"Are there any more of them?"

"There's one in the car, but he's dead to the world."

"Why don't you turn them out?"

"Drink," warbled the Saint happily.

"Thousan's of drinks. Drink to me only wi-hith thine eye-heyas an' I-hi will pledge with miiiine—"

Leonard glanced up and down the corridor. A red-faced man poked his head out of the smoke-room door and glared around to discover the source of the uproar. He discovered it, snuffed indignantly through a superb white moustache, and withdrew his head again, banging the door after it. The manageress seemed to be on the verge of hysterics.

"I," chanted the Saint, pleasantly absorbed in his own serenade, "sent thee late a ro-hosy wre-he-heath, not so much ho-hon'ring theeec, as giving it—"

"Can't you do something, Mr. Crockford?" pleaded the unfortunate manageress, almost wringing her hands.

"You can't sing without drink," said the Saint throatily, as a man propounding one of the eternal verities.

Leonard shrugged.

"I can't very well turn him out," he said.

"I've known him a long time, and he was coming to stay here. Besides, he isn't often taken like this."

"But where can we put him?"

"How about the cellar?"

"What? Among all the bottles?"

Leonard had to think fast.

"There's the porter's room. I'll shove

him in there to cool off. And the other man can go in with him."

"You can't sing without drink," insisted the Saint pathetically. "You can't really, ole sweetheart."

Crockford took him insinuatingly by the arm.

"Then you'd better come and have another drink, ole boy."

"Good idea," nodded the Saint, draping himself affectionately on Leonard's neck. "Less go on drinking. All night. All the silly ole night. That," said the Saint, "sha good idea." He turned to blow the manageress an unsteady kiss. "See you tomorrow, ole fruit, 'cos we're not going home till the morning, we're not—hic!—Leonard, ole watermelon, why does this floor wave about so much? You ought to have it s-seen to—"

They reached the porter's room with realistic unsteadiness, and lurched in; and then the Saint straightened up.

"Hustle Dismal Desmond along, kiddo," he said. "Where did you put the girl?"

"In one of the lounges. Do you have to act like this?"

"Obviously, my pet—to account for Dismal Desmond. Get Betty out of the way, up to one of the rooms. Pretend you're just playing the fool. I leave it to you, partner!"

He literally pushed Leonard out of the room, and the muffled sounds of his discordant singing followed the King of Clubs down the corridor. Leonard felt like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

He hoisted the man out of the Saint's car and carried him in, and only the simmering manageress saw him plugged into the porter's cubicle.

Through the open door came the Saint's voice:

"Why, there's dear ole Desmond! How are you, Desmond, ole pineapple? I was juss sayin'—"

Leonard closed the door, and assumed an air of official efficiency.

"Did you say all the rooms were taken, Miss Cocker?"

"Number Seven's empty at the moment, sir, but there's some people due in to-night—"

"Then I'm afraid they'll be unlucky. A girl friend of mine arrived at the same time as we did, and I must give her a room. Tell these people you're awfully sorry, but you've booked the same room twice by mistake—and pass them on to some other place."

He turned on his heel and went back up the corridor. The manageress, standing petrified, heard a short conversation in which Leonard's voice was the only one audible; and then Mr. Crockford reappeared from the lounge with the girl in his arms.

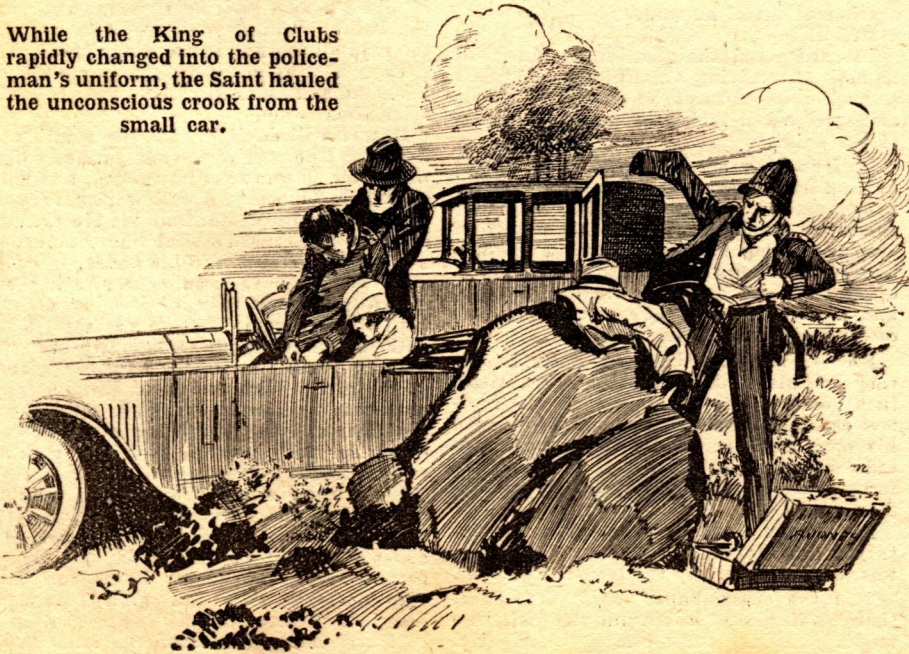
"Cavemen," said Mr. Crockford strongly, "are all the vogue, and there'll be no nonsense from you, Betty darling—see?" He swept rapidly past the scandalised Miss Cocker, and continued towards the stairs. "Do you like being carried about the place? Does it make you love me any more? What's that? Right. I'll teach you to sham dead. You wait till I drop you in the bath—"

A bend in the staircase hid him from sight, but the conversation went on. Miss Cocker, rooted in her tracks, listened, appalled.

She was standing at the foot of the stairs when Leonard came down, a few minutes later, feeling as if he had ruined his reputation for ever as far as his executive staff was concerned. And he was right.

"Will you be taking dinner, Mr. Crockford?" asked the manageress frostily, and Leonard knew that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

While the King of Clubs rapidly changed into the policeman's uniform, the Saint hauled the unconscious crook from the small car.



He grinned.

"Get sandwiches cut for about twenty people," he said, "and tell the porter to get up a couple of dozen Bass. I think we're all going out for a moonlight picnic on the moors—and we won't be home till the morning."

He passed on, comforted by the moral victory; and found the Saint sitting on the porter's bed, smoking a cigarette and surveying the man sprawled out on the floor. In much the same way an introspectively-minded cat might have surveyed a sleeping mouse.

He looked up, as Leonard came in, with a lift of one questioning eyebrow; and Leonard shook his head.

"I left her down at the other end of the corridor. And I should like to tell you that after this, either I shall have to fire her, or I shall have to fire myself."

"Why worry?" demanded the Saint. "Pub-keeping is no trade for an honest criminal. Where's Betty now?"

"I got her up to Number Seven."

"Unsuspected?"

"I think so."

"Good boy. Now let's look at you."

He stood up. Suddenly his hands went out and stroked down each side of Leonard's chin. Leonard started back.

"What the blazes—"

"Hush," said the Saint. "Not so much excitement."

He showed Leonard his hands. The palms were black with dust.

"You ought to make your bell-hop sweep under his bed more carefully," he said. "However, in this case we'll forgive him. It helps to make you look really villainous. Now—off with that collar and tie. A choker'll suit you much better. That handkerchief—"

He jerked the square of fancy silk out of Leonard's pocket.

"Knout this round your neck, and you'll start to look more like yourself. And unbutton the coat and turn up the collar at the back—it'll make you look tougher. And a rakish cap effect, as worn by college chums, would make it perfect. There ought to be a cap here somewhere—every self-respecting bell-hop has one for his night out."

He opened the wardrobe unceremoniously, rummaged, and found what he sought.

"Put that on. Over one ear, and well down over the eyes. That's the stuff!"

Leonard obeyed blindly. The Saint's staccato urgency would have overwhelmed anyone.

"But what's the idea?"

"Easy," said the Saint. "A real bulldozing would make too much noise, and we haven't a place to do it. So we take Desmond on the bend, so to speak. I'd be the stool-pigeon myself, only he'd recognise me, so you have the honour. Meanwhile, I'll park myself in Betty's room and put her wise when she wakes up."

"Yes, but—"

"I've got to leave it to your imagination what tale you tell Desmond when he comes to. The main point is that you're one of the gang, and you've been captured, too. You're the prisoners of the Five Kings, and you don't know where you are. This room won't tell anything."

He pointed to the tiny window, set high up in the wall, and looking out upon nothing more informative than another blank wall.

"Old-fashioned and unhygienic," said the Saint, "but useful on this occasion. It's much too small to get out through. And I'll lock the door and take the key with me. In half an hour's time I'll lock myself in the service-room upstairs, and start

watching. When you're through, flutter your handkerchief out of this window, and I'll see it and be right down."

"But why the rush?" asked Crockford, with what breath had not been taken away by the Saint's machine-gun fire of directions.

"For the plan," answered Simon. "You have the advantage of getting on to Desmond while he's still hazy with dope. As a friend in the same boat as himself, you worm all you can out of him, put two and two together, and worm again. The great thing is to find out under what name Whiskers is known to the police, and where Desmond was supposed to meet him to hand over Betty."

Leonard took the Saint's place on the bed.

"And you want to know that to-night?"

"Of course. This is the night when Whiskers is expecting Betty to join her uncle and complete the family party. And that's what she'll do, if you pull your stuff. I'll take her there myself, roughly disguised as Dismal Desmond. And as soon as Whiskers has rumbled that joke, you, old haricot, having followed closely behind in your fancy dress, will beetle in and arrest the lot of us—thereby hoisting Whiskers with his own whatnot. How's that for a funny story?"

Leonard looked up with enthusiasm kindling in his face.

"It gets a laugh," he said.

"My funny stories," said Simon Templar modestly, "frequently do."

"And once we've got Whiskers—"

"Exactly. The mystery of Uncle Sebastian's house will no longer be a mystery."

"You have brains, Mr. Templar."

"Thank you, Mr. Crockford."

The Saint took a quick glance round him, picked a piece of printed hotel notepaper off the table and stuffed it into his pocket, and then reached up and removed the single bulb from its socket.

"It's getting dark," he explained, "and a bad light might help you. All set?"

"You may always," said Mr. Crockford tranquilly, "leave these little things to me."

It was one of Mr. Crockford's pet expressions, and the Saint hailed it with a grin. Leonard was not the star of the Five Kings in the matter of purely abstract brains; but there could have been no greater lieutenant, when it came to the point, in the whole solar system.

The Saint opened the door cautiously and peered out. The passage was deserted. He turned back.

"You're playing the hand," he said. "Don't miss any of the important tricks. And when Dismal Desmond's conversation gets boring, or if he starts to smell rats, just blip him over the head with the sloppail and wave the flag!"

"Right you are, Saint!"

"So long, Beautiful!"

"So long, Ugly-Wugs!"

Leonard heard the turning of the lock



From his hiding-place in the tree, the crook listened-in at the end of the tapped telephone wire.

and the withdrawing of the key, but he never heard the Saint pad away down the corridor. He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself out on the bed, with one eye on the man on the floor.

#### THE CROOK.

LEONARD finished his cigarette, and lay for a time gazing at the ceiling. Then he tried to watch the minute-hand of his watch crawling round the dial. Time passed. The room was shrouded in a grey dusk. Leonard yawned.

He wondered uneasily if the Saint had under-estimated the potency of the drug in the hypodermic syringe. True, it had been only half full when Simon found it, and Simon had promptly injected the half on the assumption that what had been sauce for the goose might very justly be made sauce for the gander, but there was nothing to show that the syringe had ever been full. Perhaps Betty had only been given a few drops, the rest being kept for a repeat dose in case of need.

Leonard speculated for a moment on his chance in a murder trial. He had never been able to acquire that dispassionate valuation of human life, nor that careless contempt for the law that forbids you to bounce off your neighbour simply because you have decided that his habits are objectionable and his face an outrage, which were among the charming simplicities of Simon Templar.

But the persistent snoring of Dismal Desmond, distasteful as it might be to a sensitive man, was reassuring. Leonard lighted another cigarette.

Nevertheless, it was another ten minutes before the man on the floor gave any sign of returning consciousness. Then a snore was strangled into a grunt, and the grunt became a low moan.

Leonard twisted over on to one shoulder to observe the recovery. The man twitched and moved one leg heavily; but after that, for some time, there seemed to be a relapse. Then another groan, and another movement more vigorous than the first.

"My head!" muttered the man foggily. "He hit me—"  
Silence.  
Leonard shifted up on to his elbow. "Hallo, mate!" he said.  
Another silence. Then, painfully:  
"Who's that?"  
"They seem to have got you all right, mate," said Leonard.

"There were two men in a car. One of 'em got out an' hit me. Must have smashed us up. Cuss this head! Why's it so dark?"

"It's night. You've been out for a long time."

Silence for a long time. Leonard could sense the man's struggle to pierce the drug fumes that still murked his brain. He would have given much for a light, even while he realised that the darkness was helping his deception. But presently the voice came again.

"Who're you, anyway?"

"They got me, too."

"Is that Carris?"

"Yes."

The man strained to penetrate the gloom. Leonard could see his eyes.

"That's not Bill Carris' voice."

"This is George Carris," said Leonard. "Bill's brother."

He swung his legs off the bed and crossed the floor. The man had writhed up into a sitting posture, and Leonard put an arm round his shoulders.

"Come and lie down on the bed," he suggested. "You'll feel better in a minute."

The man peered closely into his face.

"You don't look like Bill."

"I'm not Bill—I'm George."

"You ought to look like Bill. How do you come here?"

"I was with Bill."

"On the telephone?"

"Yes."

"Bill said he was going alone."

"He changed his mind and took me. D'you think you could get over to that bed if I helped you?"

"I'll try. My head's going round and round—"

Leonard helped the man up and more or

less carried him to the bed, where he collapsed again limply. Leonard sat down on the edge. He glanced at his watch; it was over half an hour since the Saint had left him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Why don't you know?"

"I'm new. I don't know any of the gang except Bill."

"You're a liar!" snarled the man. "You're not in the gang at all. You're—"

"You fool!" retorted Leonard with an oath. "What the — d'you think I'd be doing here if they hadn't caught me, too?"

The man appeared to cogitate this argument painfully for a time. Presently he said, as though satisfied:

"Where are we?"

"I don't know. I was laid out when they brought me here. What did you say your name was, mate?"

"My name's Dyson—'Slinky' Dyson. Who're these guys you keep talking about? Who're they?"

"The Five Kings, of course."

"The Five—"

Dyson's voice choked on a note of fear.

"You're a liar!" he croaked. "The Five Kings've gone bust. They had to clear out of the country. I saw it in the papers—"

"I tell you they're back. I've seen 'em —"

"No one's ever seen the Five Kings an' got away with it."

"But I've seen 'em. An' they said they were going to torture us. I'm scared. Slinky, we've got to get out of this!"

Leonard felt the bed shaking.

"They can't do anything to me," said Dyson hoarsely. "They got nothing on me. They can't—"

"That's all you know. They want you most—for doping that girl. Flog the hide off your back, that's what they said they were going to do."

"They can't—"

Leonard Crockford, well as he knew the superstitious terror which the name of the Five Kings inspired, and the legends of ruthlessness which had grown up around them, had no need to act his contempt for the whining wretch on the bed. He caught the man's shoulder and shook him roughly.

"For Heaven's sake, stop blubbing!" he snapped. "D'you think that'll get us anywhere?"

"The Boss'll do something when he finds out."

"He's too far away to be of any use," ventured Leonard.

"I was nearly there when they got me."

Nearly there! And they had been about five miles from Two Bridges. Somewhere on the moor, then. Leonard's heart leapt with a thrill of triumph, and he drove in upon the opening like lightning.

"You don't know how far away we are now," he said. "We've both been out for over an hour. And if the Boss *does* find out, and knows it's the Five Kings, he'll most likely be too busy making his own getaway to bother about us."

"That's all *you* know. You ever heard of 'Spider' Sleet letting his bunch down?"

Spider Sleet! Point two. Leonard made his next remark almost with apprehension. It was a tremendous strain to keep up what he considered to be the right tone of voice, when his whole system was tingling with half-incredulous delight.

"They'll be bringing us some food soon. They said they would. I'm fitter than you are—I might make a bolt for it, if you keep them busy. And I'd fetch the Boss and the rest of the bunch along. Only I can never find the way alone, out on that moor. And it'd be dark—"

"How often you been there?"

"Only twice. And Bill took me each time."

"It's easy. Where did you come from?"

"Exeter."

"Through Okehampton?"

Something in the way the question was put, a faint, almost imperceptible hesitation, stabbed a sharp warning through Leonard's flush of exultation. But he had no time to think. With his muscles tensed, he flashed back his gamble.

"No—you know that's not the way. We came through Moreton Hampstead."

Slinky Dyson's breath came again, audibly, through his teeth.

"Sorry, chum. I had to make sure you were straight. Well, you went about ten miles past Moreton Hampstead—"

"I suppose so."

"That put you about two miles from Two Bridges. Don't you remember the knoll with three humps, on the right of the road near where you stopped?"

"That's about all I do remember."

"Then you can't go wrong. You make two hundred yards due north of the knoll into the dip, and follow the low ground north-west till you come to a patch of gorse in the shape of an 'S.' Then you strike off north-east—and you're there."

"But it'll be dark."

"There'll be a moon."

Leonard appeared to meditate.

"It sounds easy, the way you put it," he said. "But—"

"It is easy!" Dyson snarled. "But I don't believe you'll do it. You're yellow! You'd just cut and run, and no one'll ever see you again for dust. You miserable little dirty quitter!"

"What the blazes are you talking about?"

"What I say. I don't believe you. You're just trying to save your own skin an' get me to help you. You might make a bolt for it, you say, while I keep 'em busy. Thanks for nothing! You listen here—either we both make a bolt, or we both stay! I know your sort. Bill was always a yaller dog, an' you take after him. You—"

It struck Leonard that Mr. Dyson's conversation was certainly becoming monotonous. And his brain was humming with

## THE EDITOR GREETES YOU!



### STARS IN STORE!

I AM sure you will all be looking forward to Sydney Horler's great new story next week. You will most probably have read the notice at the end of the story by now, and have got some idea of what is in store for you. Most of you "thriller-fiction" enthusiasts are sure to have read some of Mr. Horler's enthralling novels, and will be prepared for the really gripping tale he has written for your perusal in next week's THRILLER. "The Mystery Mission," by Sydney Horler, is an example of the top-notch

batch of stories which I promised should gladden your eyes and hearts during the coming months. This is just the first of this splendid late-summer, autumn programme, and I can assure you there's going to be no back-sliding. If possible, the stories are going to get better and better, so you will be well advised to make certain that that standing order of yours is all correct. The best authors and the best stories all the time, is my motto.

Several enthusiastic readers have been sending up suggestions for stories, etc., and I am extremely gratified by their keenness. Criticisms and suggestions are always helpful, and enable me to be certain that The THRILLER is everything that my readers want it to be.

Yours sincerely,

*The Editor*

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

other things. Spider Sleat—whoever he might be—and a knoll with three humps two miles from Two Bridges on the Moreton Hampstead road. Due north—a dip—north-west to a patch of gorse in the shape of an 'S'—turn north-east.

A fight, in that dark room, might have been troublesome. Dyson was no lightweight—Leonard had noticed that when helping him to the bed. And his strength must be returning rapidly.

The Saint, in parting, had suggested the slop-pail. But Leonard had discovered something better than that—a hefty broken chair-leg, apparently used to switch off the electric light without getting out of bed. His fingers closed upon it lovingly.

#### BURIED TREASURE.

"SORRY to have kept you waiting," drawled the Saint, ten minutes later, "but your manageress is wandering about in the line of retreat looking like a flat tyre, and I didn't dare let her see me. Leonard, you've blighted her young life. I know she'll never smile again." Crockford pointed his chair-leg at the bed.

"He sleeps."

"After laying his eggs?"

"He spilled a certain amount of beans. It ought to be enough to work on."

"Let's see what you've got," murmured Simon. "Half a sec.—we'll have some light on the subject."

He felt for the socket, extracted the bulb from his pocket, and adjusted it. Leonard switched it on.

The Saint inspected Mr. Dyson with interest.

"Do you think he'll die?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

"A pity," said the Saint. "It means we'll have the trouble of roping him up. Make yourself look decent, and go out and find some string. You can talk while I tie."

Leonard removed the choker and replaced his collar while the Saint employed spit-and-polish methods, with a handkerchief, to his face. Then Leonard snooped off on his errand.

He met Miss Cocker in the corridor.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Crockford," said the lady ominously. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Nowhere particular," said Leonard evasively. "What's the trouble?"

"A gentleman's been complaining about the noise."

"Let him complain."

"He's wanting to leave at once."

"Don't stop him. Are the sandwiches and beer ready?"

"They've been waiting half an hour. But, Mr. Crockford—"

"Tell the little fellows to be patient. I shan't be long now."

He stalked away before the manageress could find her voice. But the woman was waiting for him when he came back, after a few minutes, with a couple of fathoms of stout cord in his pocket.

"Mr. Crockford—"

"Miss Cocker."

"I'm not used to being treated like this, I'm not, really. I think you must be drunk yourself. I'm used to respectable hotels, I am, and I never heard such goings on, I didn't—"

"Miss Cocker," said Leonard kindly, "take my advice and go and look for a nice respectable hotel. Because I'm turning this one into a high-class roadside gin palace, from which people will be removed, roaring drunk, in the small hours of every morning. Bye-bye, ole geranium!"

He entered the porter's room and closed the door in her face.

The girl was unconscious, oblivious to everything when Crockford seized her in his arms and carried her into the inn.



The Saint looked up with his quick smile. "Domestic strife?" he queried.

"I'm used to respectable hotels, I am, and I never heard such goings on, I didn't."

"And you always such a nice quiet gentleman, Mr. Crockford!"

"It's the only way to carry it off—to pretend I'm canned. To-morrow I shall have to see her and apologise profusely. Here's your string!"

The Saint took the cord and bent to his task with practised efficiency, while Leonard described the interview with Mr. Dyson. Simon listened intently, but his memory was baulked by the name of Sleat. It had a vaguely familiar ring about it, but nothing more.

"Spider Sleat," he repeated. "Can't place it. How many men are there supposed to be on the moor?"

"I didn't find that out."

"There's only the two of us. Dicky Tremayne took his car for a golfing tour in Scotland, and I don't know where to find him. I sent Pat off to join Terry's yachting party at Cowes—"

"You wouldn't drag her into it, anyway."

"There wouldn't be time, if I wanted to. No, my seraph—you and I must tackle this alone, and hang the odds. There's one idea—"

"What's that?"

The Saint completed his last knot, tested it, and stepped back. He faced Leonard.

"I hate to do it," he said, "but it's the most practical scheme. I know Teal's private 'phone number, and he'll probably be at home now. I'll ask if the name of Sleat means anything to him. It probably will.

Teal's got the longest memory of any man at the Yard. That means I'll have to tell him I'm on the tail of the Policeman with Wings."

"Then he'll get on the 'phone to the police round here—"

"He won't. You don't know the C.I.D. like I do. They're as jealous as a mother at a baby show, and they think rather less of the country police than a Rolls chauffeur thinks of a Ford. I'll tell Teal to come down himself by the first train in the morning to collect the specimens, and he won't say a word to a soul. Now, filter out again and remove your manageress. Take her away to a quiet place and talk to her. Apologise now, if you like, instead of to-morrow morning. But give me a clear quarter of an hour to get that trunk call through."

Leonard nodded.

"I'll see to it. But that only gives us to-night and half-to-morrow."

"It'll be enough—to get Whiskers, find out the secret of this house, and act accordingly. We've got to make this a hurry order. Off you go, son."

"Right. Where shall I meet you?"

"Betty's room—in about half an hour. Now skate!"

Leonard skated.

He found the manageress spluttering about the hall, steered her into the office, and spent a desperate twenty minutes with her. He got out at last, minus his dignity, but still blessed with a manageress; and made his way up the stairs.

Of all the Five Kings, Leonard Crockford had always been the Saint's especial friend. There were many men scattered over the

world who held Simon Templar in a reverence bordering on idolatry; there were as many, if not more, in whose aid the Saint would not have stopped at any of the crimes in the calendar; but between Leonard and the Saint was a greater bond than any of these. And Leonard considered.

The Saint gave his ultimate affection to two people only—one man and one girl. The man was Leonard Crookford. The girl was Patricia Holm. She was the cream in his coffee. And those three, like the Three Musketeers, had come together out of infinitely diverse worlds—and stuck.

And Leonard considered, soberly for him, because he realised that the girl he had seen, in sleep only, that afternoon, and she almost a stranger, had moved him far more than anyone before. Suppose she came to make a fourth inseparable, would the bonds that held the rest of them together hold as firmly? It was a fantastic castle to build in the air, but he had been moved, and he knew it.

Therefore he considered, in that brief breathing-space, and came to the girl's room in a subdued mood.

She was powdering her nose.

"Hallo, Leonard, darling!" she said.

"How are you?"

"I'm very fit," said Leonard. "How are you?"

Commonplace. But comforting. He lighted a cigarette and sat down on the bed where he could see her face in the dressing-table mirror.

They talked. He described, for the second time, the Dyson episode—and other matters. She said she thought it was clever of him to think of carrying her up the stairs as if she were teasing and he ragging. Leonard preened himself visibly. She looked nicer with her eyes open, he thought.

"Your friend's very nice," she said.

"Who—the Saint?"

"Is that what you call him? He said his name was Simon."

"Everyone calls him the Saint."

"He's a sheik."

Leonard eased up on the preening.

She was plainly frightened by her adventure, but he thought she bore up remarkably well. Her nerves were palpably fluttered, but there was no hint of hysterics in her voice. She explained the doping.

"I was driving, and I felt something prick my leg. He showed me a pin sticking out of the upholstery, and said it must have been that. But a minute or so later I began to feel horribly dizzy, and I had to stop the car. My leg seemed to have swollen up and gone numb. That's all I remember until I woke up here and found Simon—or the Saint—sitting in the arm-chair. He made me put my head under the cold tap, and then he made me lie down again and told me all about it."

The minutes seemed to fly. She sat down beside him, and he took her hand absently and went on talking. She didn't seem to mind—he recalled that afterwards. But he had hardly got started when he was interrupted by a gentle tap on the door, and Simon Templar came in.

Leonard was acutely conscious of his eccentric garb, for he was still wearing his police trousers with his ordinary coat, and his face was still somewhat soiled from the Saint's improvised make-up. Leonard felt depressingly unlike a sheik; and the Saint was as offensively sleek and Savile Row and patent-leather as a man can possibly be.

"Sorry to have to barge in like this, boys and girls," he said breezily, "but I thought you ought to know that I've had a heart-to-heart chat with Teal over the long-distance wire—and worked the trick. He'll be at Exeter to-morrow afternoon to stand us a

drink and remove the exhibits. But there'll be no sleep for the just between now and then, Dogface!"

"Did you find out about Sleat?"

"And how!" The Saint swung round to the girl. "Tell me, old dear—when did Uncle Sebastian start building that house?"

"I can tell you exactly," said Betty, "because it was a week before my birthday. I was staying with him in Torquay, and he took me over to see the foundations being dug."

"You are all legs and pigtales, on your holidays," said the Saint. "I know. And when is this birthday?"

"The third of August."

"Five days ago—and to think you didn't invite us to the party! But a week before that would be the twenty-seventh of July, seven years ago makes it nineteen twenty-two. Leonard, my archangel, it's too good to be true!"

"Why?"

"Because on the fifth of July, nineteen twenty-two, Harry Sleat, known as Spider Sleat, was arrested at Southampton. On the first of August, nineteen twenty-two, he was convicted at the Old Bailey and sent down for seven years for busting the strong-room of the *Presidential* and getting away at Plymouth with fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds that were on their way over to America. All that from the marvellous memory of our one and only Claude Eustace Teal."

Leonard forgot his clothes in the absorption of this cataract of facts. But his mind seized instantly on one clear idea.

"They never found the diamonds?"

"Never in all their days. But Whiskers was on the loose with the sparklers before Uncle Sebastian started to build his house. And Whiskers was in this district before they nobbled him—he must have been. And Whiskers, being an insubordinate convict, had to serve almost his full term. He came out on the eighth of June. What's he do first?"

Leonard leapt into the breach, momentarily oblivious of the bewildered girl.

"He tries to buy the house. Then, when uncle won't sell, he tries to scare him out. Then, when uncle won't be scared, he kidnaps uncle and follows through with kidnapping Betty—"

"Because Betty is uncle's heir, and if uncle merely vanishes the house goes to Betty—"

"So that Whiskers has to pinch them both, force them to sign a deed of sale dated some weeks before their disappearance—"

"And kill them—or otherwise keep them out of the way—while he takes possession, disinters the loot, and slithers off in the general direction of the tall timber. Dogface, my pet, we're next to the goods this time!"

The girl was staring blankly at them.

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about," she said.

The Saint slapped his thigh.

"But it's marvellous!" he cried. "It's the maddest, merriest story that ever brought the roof down. Think of it! Whiskers, having got clean away with his fifty thousand quid's worth of crystallised carbon, with the dicks hard on his heels, comes upon a field in the dead of night, and buries the diamonds deep down."

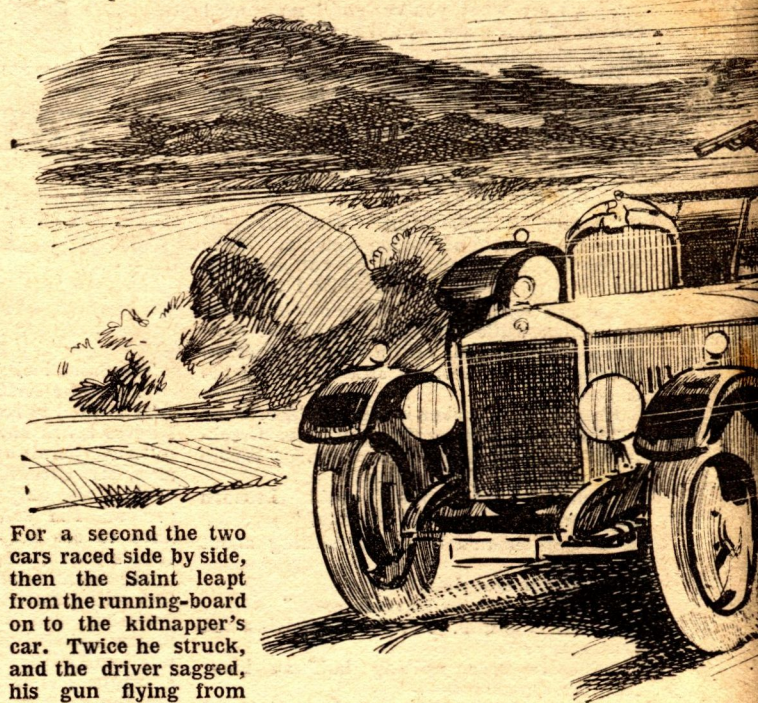
Leonard chipped in:

"Then they catch him—"

"And he goes to gaol quite cheerfully, knowing where he can find his fortune when he comes out. And he comes out, all ready to make a splash and enjoy himself—and finds somebody's bought his field and built a house on top of the treasure. Oh, *Baby!* Can you beat it?"

The girl gasped. It was a perfect story. As an explanation of the whole mystery, it was the only possible one that was convincing at the same time—and even then it read like the creation of some imaginative novelist's brain. It wanted some digesting.

But the two men before her seemed to find it sufficiently accredited. The Saint, hands on hips, was shaking with silent laughter. Leonard, always less effervescent by nature than the Saint, was grinning delightedly.



For a second the two cars raced side by side, then the Saint leapt from the running-board on to the kidnapper's car. Twice he struck, and the driver sagged, his gun flying from his grasp.

"It sounds good," he said.

"It's the caterpillar's spats! Now, this is where we take the spring-board for the high dive. Is there provender ready for the troops?"

"Yes."

"Load it up in the Desurio. We'll park most of it at Betty's for future reference, on the way over, and just take what we need for supper to drink in the car as we go along. We'll leave the Morris, because the police'll be looking for it. You and Betty can go out quite openly, and I'll sneak along to the best bath-room—that's the one looking out on to the garage drive, isn't it?—and drop out of the window and meet you there."

"What about Dyson? We can't leave him in the porter's room."

"Toddle along and give him another clip

over the ear. Then he won't yelp or struggle, and you can carry him out to the car. We'll take him with us. I couldn't bear to be parted from Dismal Desmond, even for an hour."

"I ought to be able to do that," said Leonard. "There's a door leading into the garden right opposite the porter's room, and it's dark enough now for no one to notice, if I'm quick."

"That's fine! Betty, old sweetheart—"

The Saint's rattling volley of instructions

Simon Templar in such a mood could be, intervened sympathetically.

"Leave this to me, old boy."

In language less picturesquely volcanic than the Saint would have employed, but language nevertheless infinitely more intelligible to a lay audience, he summarised the main features of the situation and what he knew of the plot, while the Saint listened with undisguised admiration. Simon had never ceased to admire and envy, without being able to imitate, Leonard's

not ridiculous. But the Saint spoke. He was pleading; he was friendly; he was masterful; he was confidential; he was flippant; he was romantic; he was impudent. And change followed effortless change with a crazily kaleidoscopic speed that would have left any girl battered into submission—and probably mazedly wondering why she submitted.

And it was all done in a few minutes, and the girl was looking at him with wide eyes and saying:

"Do you really think I ought to do it?"

"I really do," said the Saint, as if the fate of worlds depended on it.

She hesitated, looked helplessly at Leonard. Then—

"All right," she said. "I'll go. But I don't mind telling you I'm terrified. Honestly. After this evening—"

"That's a good girl," said the Saint, and brazenly hugged her.

Leonard felt morosely pleased that he was shortly going to be able to give Mr. Dyson another clip over the ear. Anyone else would have done equally well, but if it had to be Mr. Dyson. . . .

#### PRISONERS.

"THAT," said the Saint, "should be the place."

He lay full length in the long damp grass, peering over the crest of a convenient hummock at the house.

When you have as extensive a wardrobe as the Saint's, you can afford to maltreat a poem in light grey fresco by a Savile Row tailor by stretching it out full length in long, damp grass. Leonard Crockford, mindful of the dignity of his police uniform, contented himself with sinking to a squatting position. The girl was a little way behind them.

They could see the house, a stumpy black bulk in the moonlight, with two windows sharply cut out in yellow luminance. The sky was as clear as a bowl of dark glass; and in spite of Mr. Dyson's confident assurance, the fragment of moon that rode low down in the sky had been less help to them in their journey than the stars. A mile away, just off the road, the Desurio was parked with all its lights out.

The Saint squirmed down a little, so that the flame of his match would not be visible to any watchers outside the cottage, and lighted a cigarette in his cupped hands.

"We might as well start now," he murmured. "Where's the girl?"

They crept back together to rejoin her. "On the mark, kid?"

A clammy breath of wind had been born on the moor. She shivered in her thin coat.

"The sooner you get it over, the better I'll be pleased."

"You'll soon be happy," said the Saint.

His teeth gleamed in a smile—it was all they could distinguish of his expression in the gloom. But the faint tremor of eagerness in his voice was perceptible without the aid of eyes.

"All got your pieces ready to say?" he asked.

She said nervously:

"I don't know what I've got to do—"

"Nor would you if you'd really been kidnapped. That's your piece. Anyhow, you're supposed to be dead to the world, having assimilated the second instalment of that syringe-ful. Leonard, you've got your gun?"

Crockford slapped his pocket for answer.

"Haven't you got a gun, Saint?" asked the girl.

Simon was heard to chuckle softly.

"Ask Leonard if I ever carry guns," he said. "No; I leave them to other people. Personally, I can't stand the noise. I



was cut short as if by the turning off of a tap. He turned to the dazed girl with his most winning smile.

"Betty, old sweetheart, will you do it?"

"What do you want me to do?" she asked dazedly. "I've hardly understood a word of what you've been saying."

The Saint seemed wilted by her denseness. Unused (as in his sober moments he was always ready to confess) to the less mercurial habits of ordinary folk, he was invariably taken aback by anyone showing the least surprise at anything he did or said. The limitations of the ordinary person's outlook on life were to him a never-ending source of hurt puzzlement.

"My dear old peach-blossom—"

Leonard, who was of a commoner humanity, and who knew by his own experience what a shock a first meeting with

gift for meeting every known species of human life on its own ground. People had to adapt themselves to the Saint; Leonard was able to adapt himself to people.

He explained, and the girl understood. Then he came to the Saint's question, and he could see an automatic refusal starting to her lips.

The Saint stepped in again—but in this he was sure of himself. He had his own particular brand of parlour tricks, had Simon Templar.

"Betty, darling—"

This time it was Leonard who listened in envious admiration.

It would be useless to attempt to record what the Saint said. The bare words, bereft of the magical charm of voice which the Saint could assume on occasion with such deadly ease, would appear banal, if

have my own copyright armoury, which is much more silent—and just as useful. So we're ready?"

"Yes."

"Fine! Leonard, we expect you to make your dramatic entrance in ten minutes. S'long!"

"So long, Saint! So long, Betty!"

Leonard felt for the girl's hand and gave it a reassuring pressure. A moment later he was alone.

The Saint, with one arm around the girl's waist to steady her, picked their way over the uneven ground with the uncanny surefootedness of a cat. It was dark enough for his clothes to be unnoticeable. He wore Mr. Dyson's soft hat pulled well down over his eyes, and he had turned up the collar of his coat to assist the crude disguise. Even before they were near the house, he was walking with knees bent and shoulders stooped so as to approximate more to the height of Mr. Dyson.

Mr. Dyson himself slept peacefully in the Desurio, roped hand and foot and gagged with his own handkerchief.

The Saint was not bothering to take precautions. He felt a thread snap across his shin, and knew he had sprung a trip-alarm, but he went on unabashed. Only the lights in the two windows went out suddenly.

He had no idea where the door of the house would be, but his preternaturally keen ears heard it creak open when he was still twenty yards away. Instantly he stopped, and his grip on the girl tightened. She felt his lips brush her ear.

"Now go dead," he whispered. "And don't worry. We win this game!"

He stooped quickly, and lifted her in

his arms like a child. It seemed as if there was a rustling in the grass around him that was not of the wind; and the Saint grinned invisibly. He moved forward again, with slower steps.

Then, directly in front of him, the darkness was split by a probing finger of light.

The Saint halted.

His coat collar shrouded his chin; the girl he carried helped to cover his body; he lowered his head so that the hat brim obscured most of his face, and kept his eyes away from the blinding beam of the torch.

There was a second's pause, broken only by the rustling of the grass; and then, from behind the light, a harsh voice spoke—half-startled, half-relieved.

"Dyson!"

"Who did you think it was?" Simon snapped back hoarsely. "Put out that light!"

The light winked, and went out. The voice spoke again.

"Why didn't you give the signal?"

"Why should I?"

In the shadowy mass of the house, an upright oblong of light was carved out abruptly. That was the door. Just inside, a man was kindling an oil lamp. His back was turned to the Saint.

Simon straightened up, and walked in. He set the girl down on her feet; and in three quick, smooth movements he took off his borrowed hat, turned down his collar, and settled his coat. But the man was still busy with the lamp, and the shout came from behind the Saint—from outside the door.

"That's not Dyson!"

The man spun round with a smothered exclamation.

Simon, standing at his elegant ease, was lighting a second cigarette from the stump of his first.

"No, this isn't Dyson, dear heart," he murmured. "But, if you remember, I never said it was. I should like to maintain my reputation for truthfulness for a few minutes longer."

He looked up blandly, waving his match gently in the air to extinguish it, and saw the men crowding in behind him. One—two—three—four, and two of them displaying automatics. Slightly bigger odds than the Saint had seriously expected. Simon Templar's face became extraordinarily mild.

"Well, well, well!" he drawled. "Look at all the flies. Spider, I congratulate you on the collection!"

The man by the lamp took a pace forward. The movement was queerly lopsided—the shuffling forward of one twisted foot, and the dragging of another twisted foot after it. Simon understood at once the origin of the nickname. The man was almost a dwarf, though tremendously broad of shoulder, with short, deformed legs and long, ape-like arms. In a small, wrinkled face, incredibly faded blue eyes blinked under shaggy eyebrows.

"One of these matinee idols we read about," thought the Saint, in his mild way, and felt the girl's shoulder shudder against his.

The man took another slithering step towards them, peering at them crookedly. Then:

"Who are you?" he asked, in that harsh, cracked voice.

"His Royal Highness, the Prince What's-it of I forget where," said the Saint. "And you're Mr. Sleat. Pleased to have you meet me. The introductions having

been effected, do you curtsy first or do I? I'm afraid I hocked my table of precedence two seasons ago."

"And this—lady?"

"Miss Betty Bonas. I believe you wanted to see her, so I brought her along. The escort you provided was unfortunately—er—unable to continue the journey. I'm afraid he hit his head on a piece of wood, or something. Anyway, the poor fellow was quite incapacitated, so I thought I'd better take his place."

The pale eyes stared back horribly.

"So you've met Dyson?"

"Slinkin'—I believe—is what his friends call him. But I call him Dismal Desmond. Yes, I think I can say that we—er—made contact."

Sleat looked round.

"Close that door."

Simon saw the door shut and barred.

"Do you know," he said conversationally, "when I didn't know you so intimately as this, I used to call you Whiskers? And now I find you've shaved. It's terribly disappointing. However, to talk of pleasanter things—"

"Take them in here."

"To talk of pleasanter things," continued the Saint affably, taking Betty's hand and following without protest into the room where the dwarf led the way with the lamp, "don't you find the air up here very bracing? And we've been having such lovely weather lately. My Auntie Ethel always used to say—"

Sleat turned with a snarl that bared a row of yellow teeth.

"That'll do, for a minute."

"But I'm not nearly satisfied yet," remarked Simon. "I want more and more. For instance, what are your favourite indoor sports? Halma, ludo, funny faces—"

Without the least warning, the dwarf reached up and struck him, flat-handed, across the mouth.

Once before in Simon's life a man had dared to do that. And this time, as before, for one blinding second, Simon saw red.

There were two men covering him with automatics, and two men standing by with heavy sticks; but not even a battery of artillery and a land mine would have stopped the Saint in such a mood. His fist had leapt like a cannon-ball from his shoulder before he had consciously aimed the blow.

And the next second he was again as cool as ice, and the dwarf was picking himself off the floor with a trickle of blood running down from his smashed lips. Nobody else had moved.

"A distinct loss of temper," murmured the Saint regretfully, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "All the same, I shouldn't do that again if I were you, Beautiful—you might get hurt next time. A joke's a joke, as Auntie Ethel used to say."

"You—"

"Hush!" said the Saint. "Not before the Bible class. They might misunderstand you. And if you want to know why they didn't shoot me, the answer is that they never had the nerve. Isn't that so, honey-bunch?"

He swung round on one of the armed men, and, without the least haste or heat, flicked him under the nose. He saw the man's finger tighten on the trigger, and threw up his hands.

"One moment!" he rapped. "Hear my speech before you decide to shoot—or you may be sorry later. You, too, Angel Face!"

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He turned to crack the warning at Sleat, whose right hand was snaking down to his hip. There was a blaze of fury in the dwarf's eyes, and for a moment Simon thought he would shoot—without waiting to listen. Simon stood quite still.

"Who are you?" rasped Sleat.

"I am Inspector Maxwell, of Scotland Yard, and I've come to get y—"

Sleat's hand came up, deliberately.

"Your views on the much-disputed question, why was Bernard Shaw? And—seriously—I'll advise you to be careful with that popgun, because my men are all round this house, and anyone who's going to get through that cordon will have to be thinner than a lath before breakfast. You can't laugh that off, Rudolph!"

"I've a good mind—"

"To shoot and chance the consequences. I know. But I shouldn't. I shouldn't, really. Because if you do, you'll quite certainly be hanged by the neck until you're so dead that it'll be practically impossible to distinguish you from a corpse. Not that a little more length in the neck wouldn't improve your beauty, but the way they do the stretching—"

One of the armed guard cut in savagely: "Dyson's squealed—"

"It was a good squeak," said the Saint meditatively, "as squeaks go. But the sweet pet had no choice. When we started to singe his second ear—"

"You're clever!" grated Sleat.

"Very," agreed the Saint modestly. "My Auntie Ethel always said—"

The sentence merged into a thunderous pounding on the outer door, and the Saint broke off with a smile.

"My men are getting anxious about me. It's my fault, for getting so absorbed in this genial chit-chat. But tell me, Spider," said the Saint persuasively, "is this or is this not entitled to be called a cop?"

Sleat drew back a pace.

His eyes fled round the room, like the eyes of a hunted animal seeking an avenue of escape. And yet—there was something about the eyes that was not surrendering. Pale, expressionless eyes in a mask-like, wrinkled face. Something about the eyes that told Simon, with a weird certainty, that it was not going to be called a cop.

The guard stood like statues. Or like three statues—for the fourth was staring at Simon with a wild intentness.

Sleat's eyes came back to the Saint, palely, expressionlessly. It was an eerie effect, that sudden paling out of their blaze of fury into a blind, cold emptiness. Simon gripped the girl's arm to steady her, and felt her trembling.

"Don't look at me like that!" she mouthed sharply, shakily. "It's horrible!"

"Bear up, old dear," encouraged the Saint. "He can't help it. If you had a face like that—"

Again the thunder on the door.

And Sleat came to life. He motioned back the two armed men of the guard.

"Behind those curtains! You take the girl—you take the man. And if they try to give one word of warning—if you hear them say anything that might have a double meaning—you'll shoot! Understand?"

The men nodded dumbly, moving to obey. Sleat turned to the other two, indicating each in turn with a jerky, pointing finger.

"You stay here. You go and open the door. And you—"

He swung round on the Saint.

"You—you heard the orders I gave. They'll be carried out. So you'll dismiss your men, on any excuse you can invent—"

"Shall I, dear angel?"

"You will—unless you want to die where you stand, and the girl with you. If you had been alone, I might have been afraid that your sense of duty might have outweighed your discretion. But you have a—responsibility. I think you will be discreet. Now—"

The Saint heard the unbarring of the outer door, and the measured step of heavy feet. The curtains three yards away from him reached to the floor. They had settled down, and there was nothing to betray the presence of the men behind them. The third man, standing in one corner, was still staring at him.

Sleat's hands, with the automatic, had gone behind him.

Then Leonard Crockford walked in and saluted, and Simon's face was terribly saintly.

"Yes, constable?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Leonard stiffly, "but your time's up. Sergeant Jones sent me in to see if you were all right."

"Quite all right, thanks," said the Saint. "As a matter of fact—"

And then, out of the tail of his eye, Simon saw a strange light dawn in the face of the third man, the man in the corner, the man who had been staring.

"Boss—"

Sleat craned round at the exclamation, with a malignant threat in his face that should have silenced the man. But the man was not silenced. He was pointing at the Saint with a shaking hand.

"Boss, dat ain't no bull! I see de picture in de papers weeks back. Dat guy wid de goil's Simon Templar, an' he's de chief of de Five Kings!"

Sleat spun back with his gun hand leaping into view, but the Saint's hands were high in the air.

"O.K., buddy!" he drawled. "You take the memory prize. And I think you ought to go down in history as the first man who's ever been able to recognise anyone from a newspaper photograph. Leonard, take that hand away from your

pocket. There's a whole firing squad got the drop on you at this moment, and they mightn't believe you were only going to produce your birth certificate. Boys and girls, you may take it from me. This is our night out!"

#### BLUFF.

CROCKFORD saw the gun in Sleat's hand even as the Saint warned him, and his hands went up slowly as he moved over to join the Saint. Then the curtains moved, and the hidden men came out.

"So!" said Sleat harshly. "I thought you were a fraud from the first word you spoke. I've known a good many busies—"

"And you'll know a lot more before you're finished," said the Saint equably. "You've heard of the Five Kings?"

"I have."

"Then you'll know there are—five."

"One was killed—"

"He's been replaced. The other three are outside this house now. Unless you leave as my prisoners, you'll never pass them. They'll stalk you over the moor, in the dark, and take you one by one. Not one of you will reach the road alive. Those were my orders. You can smile at that one, sonny boy!"

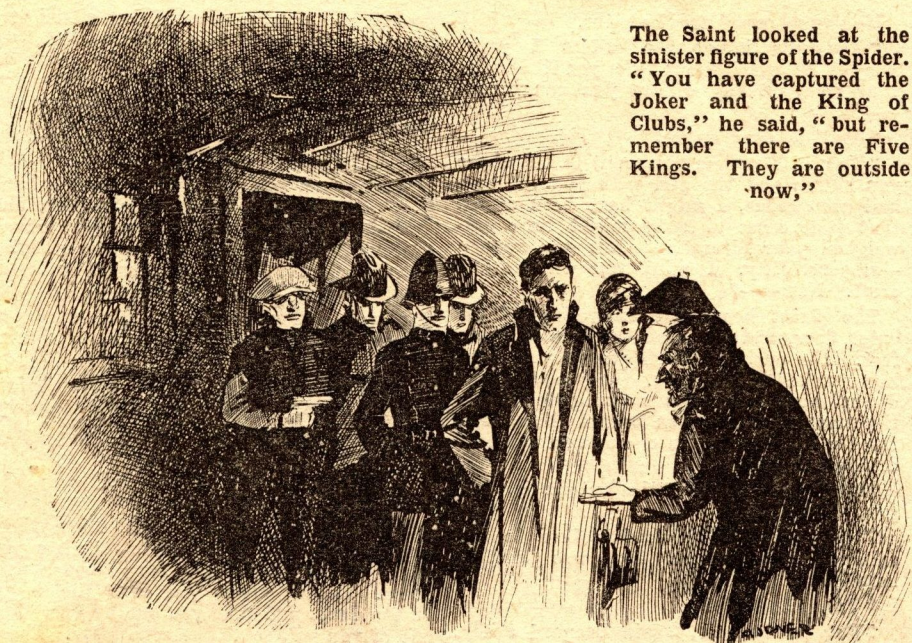
"The Five Kings don't kill."

"They killed Chastel—you've heard of him? And there are others who've never been heard of. And for me they would kill you with as little compunction as they'd kill any other poisonous spider. If you don't believe me, send one of your men outside and see if he comes back."

It was bluff—blind, desperate bluff. But it was the only card Simon could find



When Crockford entered the room, he found the Saint sitting down, smoking a cigarette and calmly surveying their senseless captive sprawled out on the floor.



The Saint looked at the sinister figure of the Spider. "You have captured the Joker and the King of Clubs," he said, "but remember there are Five Kings. They are outside now,"

in his hand at that moment. At least, it gave him a few seconds' respite, to think.

Sleat looked at him, his head on one side, as though seeking the first flaw in voice or manner. But the Saint stood as coldly solid as an iceberg, and his voice was as smooth and hard as polished steel.

"You think they'll obey your orders?" said Sleat.

"In anything."  
The dwarf nodded.

"Then you'll give me a key to let myself out of your trap. It used to be said that the Five Kings were clever, but it seems that they also make their mistakes. You will call them in here—please."

Simon laughed shortly.

"You have a hope!"

"Otherwise—fetch me a rope, Wells."  
One of the men left the room.

"He's bluffing," said Leonard tensely.

"Of course he is," murmured the Saint. "But don't spoil his fun, if it amuses him. A plain man of simple amusements, our Whiskers. He reminds me of—"

"In a moment we shall see who's bluffing," said Sleat.

He turned as the man came back with a length of rope. Sleat took it and tied it in a short loop.

"Just now," he said, as he worked, "you spoke to me of a way of stretching necks. Personally, I prefer to compress them horizontally."

He tightened his knot carefully. The loop was just big enough to pass over a man's head. He passed it back to the man who had brought it.

"That rope, Wells, and the poker. You understand the principle of the garotte? You put the loop round the man's neck, put the poker through the loop and twist, so that the rope tightens slowly. Very slowly, you understand, Wells. No—"

He broke off, and a gleam of venomous ferocity came into his faded eyes.

"No," said Sleat. "I made a mistake. Not round the man's neck. Round the girl's."

Leonard started forward, and instantly an armed man barred his way menacingly. Leonard, helpless before the automatic that drove into his chest, raved like a maniac:

"You filthy scum—"

"My shout, Dogface!"

The Saint's voice came very quietly. A stick of dynamite may also be quiet for a long time.

Simon was facing Sleat.

"I admit the argument. And the answer is—there's no one outside. That's the truth."

"I see—another bluff!"

"We don't get you, Funny Face."

"Was his face as funny as that before you hit him?" asked Leonard insultingly.

"No," said the Saint. "Before that, it was a tragedy."

Sleat stepped forward, his face contorted in a spasm of rage. The Saint thought for a second that Sleat was going to strike him again, and braced himself for the shock; but with a tremendous effort, the man controlled himself.

"I could deal with your humour more comfortably, Templar," he said malevolently, "if you were tied up. Some more rope, Wells."

"Another of these brave men," snapped Leonard.

The Saint smiled. There had never been a time when the Saint could not smile.

"He's got a weak heart," said the Saint, "and his grandmother told him never to leave off his woollen vest and never to risk the shock of being hit back. He forgot it just now, and he might have been killed. Wouldn't that have been dreadful?"

Then the man came back, this time with a great coil of rope over his arm. Two of the others seized the Saint.

"Search him," said Sleat, "and tie him up."

The Saint was searched, but he had no fear of that. He never carried such obvious things as firearms—only the two little knives which he could throw with such supernatural skill. And they were where only one who knew the secret would ever have dreamed of searching—Anna, his favourite, in a sheath strapped to his left forearm, and Belle, the second, in a similar sheath strapped to his right calf under his sock.

Then they brought up a chair, and he sat down willingly. To have struggled would have been simply a useless waste of energy. They bound his hands behind his back, and roped his ankles to the legs of the chair. Simon encouraged them.

"This is the twenty-seventh time I've

been tied up like this," he said pleasantly, "and every time I've got away somehow. Just like the hero of numberless hectic adventures in a story-book. But don't let that depress you. Just try to do better than your predecessors. I'm afraid, though, your technique rather reminds me of the technique of the twenty-second man who did this. I called him Halfred the Hideous, and Auntie Ethel never took very kindly to him, either. He died, unhappily. I had to push him off the top of the house a few hours later. He fell into the orchard, and next season all the trees grew blood oranges."

The Saint's voice was as calm as if he had been discussing the following day's race-card, and as cheerfully optimistic as if he had been discussing it in the spirit of having collected a packet over a twenty-to-one winner that afternoon. He did it, as much as anything, to lighten the hearts of the others—and particularly the girl's. But he would probably have behaved in the same way, for his own entertainment, if he had been alone. The Saint never believed in getting all hot under the collar about anything. It was so bad for the smartness of the collar.

Sleat stood by the wall in silence, his automatic in his hand. His fury had settled down into something horribly soft and deadly, like gently simmering vitriol. To anyone less reckless than the Saint that sudden restraint might have been more paralysing to the tongue than any show of violence. Even Simon felt a chilly tingle slide up his spine like the touch of a clammy hand, and smiled more seraphically than ever.

Sleat spoke.

"Now the other man."

"Leonard—"

The girl's control broke for an instant in that involuntary cry. Crockford, forced into a chair like the Saint, with the men rapidly pinioning his arms and legs, answered her urgently: "Don't worry, darling. These blistered rats can't do anything I care about. And when I get near that misshapen blot on the landscape, over by that wall, I'll—"

"You shall have the job of killing him, Leonard, on behalf of the Five Kings," said the Saint dispassionately. "I promise you that. And I should recommend a sharply-pointed barge-pole. You wouldn't want to touch the skunk with anything shorter."

The girl stifled a sob. She was white and shaking.

"But what are they going to do?"

"Nothing," said Leonard brusquely.

Sleat put his automatic away in his pocket.

"Now the girl," he said.

Leonard strained at his bonds in an agony.

"You're even afraid of her, are you?" he blazed. "That's sensible of you! New-born babes would be about your fighting mark, you white-livered—"

"Why get excited, son?" Simon's voice drawled in. "You'll only scare the girl. Whereas there's really nothing—"

"All right, boss."

Wells spoke. The roping was finished.

Sleat moved twistedly off the wall. "Pale blue eyes," thought the Saint. "Pale blue eyes. All ruthless men—murderers and great generals—have them. This is our evening!" And Sleat picked up his loop of rope from the floor where it had fallen, and shuffled forward again.

He halted in front of the Saint.

"You are the professional humorist of the

party, I believe, Templar?" he said, and his cracked voice was high-pitched and uneven.

Simon looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Quite right," he said. "At least, that's my reputation. And you're the monstrosity from the touring menagerie, aren't you? Let me know when you're ready to start your turn."

Then he saw what was going to happen, and his voice ripped out again in a desperate command.

"Don't look, Betty! Whiskers is going to make one of his funny faces, and you might die laughing!"

"I dislike your kind of humour," said Sleat, in the same tone as before, and swung the loose end of his rope.

The girl screamed once, and closed her eyes.

Leonard swore foully, impotently.

Sleat babbled: ". . . that—and that—and that—and that—and that!" He paused, panting. "And if you've any more humorous remarks to make, Templar—"

"Only," said the Saint, with nothing but the least tremor in his voice, "that my Auntie Ethel had a very good joke about an incorrigible bimetalist of Salt Lake City whose hobby was collecting freaks. He was quite happy until one day he noticed that all pigs had short curly tails. He went quite mad, and wore himself to a shadow touring all the pig-farms in America looking for a pig with a long, straight tail. For all I know, he's searching still, and it occurred to me that perhaps your tail—"

Sleat, with the face of a fiend, lifted his rope's end again.

"Then you can add that—and that—"

It was Leonard who interrupted, with an unprintable profanity which, for some reason, found its mark.

The dwarf turned on him.

"Another humorist?" he sneered. "Then—"

He struck once, twice.

"You fool!" sobbed the girl hysterically. "That won't help you! There aren't any men outside, I tell you—"

Sleat paused with his hand raised again—and slowly lowered it. And as slowly as that slow movement, the flush of madness froze under the surface of his face, leaving it grey and twitching.

"There aren't any men outside," he muttered. "That's what I wanted to be sure about, in case he was trying to make me walk out into a trap. But there aren't any men outside!"

He dropped the rope.

"Oh, Leonard—Saint—"

The girl was sobbing weakly in her chair.

Leonard called to her, insistently:

"Don't cry, dear—don't cry, please! It'll only make that walking ulcer think he's won. I'm not hurt. Don't cry!"

"You beasts—you beasts!"

Sleat shambled over to her and tilted back her head brutally.

"How did they come here?" he demanded.

"In a car—it's by the road—and your man's in it—"

"You little fool!" broke in the Saint's bitter voice. "You're smashing the

game to glory! Why don't you go down on your knees and beg the seab to spare us? That'd finish it splendidly."

Sleat turned.

"Unless you want some more rope, Templar—"

"Thanks," said the Saint clearly, with his head held high and the blood running down to stain his collar, "that hurts me a lot less than the thought of all the clean mud you must have soiled by crawling through it."

The dwarf lifted his hand, and then he mastered himself.

"I know all I want to know," he said.

"And I have things to attend to at once."

"Disposing of the body of Sebastian Bonas, for instance?" suggested the Saint insolently.

"Yes; I shall do that at the same time as I dispose of yours."

"So he's dead!" said Leonard.

"He died of heart failure."

"When he saw you, I suppose?"

The girl said: "You cowards! You murdered him!"

"I said he died of heart failure," snarled the dwarf. "Why should I trouble to lie, when none of you will ever be able to use anything I tell you? The shock killed him."

"That is sufficient for me," said the Saint. "For that alone I shall be justified in ordering your execution. And the sentence will be carried out."

Sleat shook his head. His eyes shifted over to the Saint, and a slow, malevolent leer came into his wrinkled face.

"You will order nothing," he said.

Only the dim yellow light of the oil lamp on the table illuminated that macabre scene. The four guards stood motionless around the walls. Simon, Leonard, and Betty, in their chairs, were ranged in a rough crescent. In the centre of the room stood Sleat, with a queer light flickering in his pale eyes, and his face twisted and ghoulish.

There was a moment's silence.

Leonard sat grimly still. His face was white, save for the two thick red weals that ran across either cheek, and behind his eyes burned a dull fire. He looked at the Saint, and saw the Saint's head thrown back with its old unconquerable, mocking arrogance, and the Saint's face bruised and cut. He looked at the girl, and met her eyes. Her quick breathing was the only sound in that moment's silence.

"I warn you," said the Saint clearly, "that whatever you do—whether you fly to the end of the world, or hide yourself at the bottom of the sea—my friends will follow you and find you. And you will die."

Again Sleat shook his head. It was like the wagging of the head of a grotesque doll.

"You will order nothing," he repeated.

"Because you—and these two friends of yours—will die—to-night!"

A window rattled in the wind, and the flame of the lamp flickered like a tired soul.

#### THE LAST HOPE.

THE Saint felt the atmosphere weighing down as if with a tense, dark, evil heaviness. And he laughed the laugh of a boy, and shattered that evil cloud with a breath.

"Very dramatic!" he mocked, in a voice that slipped through that murky room like a shaft of sunlight. "But a shade theatrical, my pet. Never mind. We don't object to sharing your simple fun. That infectious gaiety is the most charming thing about you. And after Leonard's dealt with you I shall commemorate it in a snappy little epitaph which I've just made up. It's all about a handsome young hero named Sleat, whose pleasures were simple but sweet. He'd be happy for hours just gathering flowers, or removing his whiskers with Veet. That ought to look well in marble."

"With a memorial statue over a refuse heap," added Leonard.

Sleat leered and shuffled away.

He went into one corner and dragged aside a box that stood there. Stooping, he picked up what looked like two ends of black cord, and came a little forward again, trailing them behind him.

"I've been to prison, once," he said, "and I swore then that I'd never be taken again. I prepared this place so that if the police ever came here I could blow them all to blazes and myself with them. You see these fuses?"

No one answered.

"This one, marked with a piece of thread, is fast. It burns in about three seconds. The other is slow. It should burn for about eight minutes. And under this floor there are twenty pounds of dynamite. In the next room—the vacant eyes focused on the girl—is your uncle. He is dead. You will soon join him. And there will be no trace, nothing but a crater in the moor, in eight minutes' time. I light the slow fuse, you understand."

The eyes moved along the short line of bound figures, studied with a ghastly delight the girl sitting numbed with horror and the two men sitting erect and unflinching.

"The slow fuse," said Sleat harshly. "I don't want to blow myself up as well. So you will have a little leisure in which to meditate your folly. I shall hear the explosion as I drive away, and I shall laugh."

He laughed then, a short, raucous cackle.

"So easy," he said, "and so quick, after the first eight minutes. Some matches, Wells. And you may go. You may all go. Find his car and wait for me with it on the road. I light the slow fuse."

The match was sizzling up between his fingers as the men filed out. He touched the



Crouching in the grass they watched and waited, peering through the gloom at the mysterious house in which the murderer lurked.



## Weird Vampire Men

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match to the fuse and blew on the glowing end so that it shone like a tiny glow-worm. He held it up.

"You see?" he cackled. "I've lighted the fuse."

"Yes," said Simon mechanically, "you've lighted the fuse."

And now that there was no longer anyone behind him the Saint was reaching his bound hands down and round behind the chair, twisting them till the cords ate into his wrists. It was impossible to reach the knife on his leg; but if he could only loosen the ropes on his wrists sufficiently, the merest trifle would do, enough to enable the fingers of his right hand to reach the hilt of the little knife on his left forearm.

Sleat dropped the lighted fuse and came over to the Saint. He thrust his face down to within a few inches of Simon's.

"And you die!" he gloated. "While I go and collect the diamonds for which I gave seven years of my life. You knew about the diamonds? I thought you did. You know too much, my friend, you and your Five Kings. And you are too funny."

He lashed out at the Saint's face, but Simon dropped his head and took the blow on his forehead. Sleat did not seem to notice it. He turned to the girl and took her face between his hands.

"You are beautiful," he said, and she looked him in the eyes.

"I'm not afraid of you," she flashed back.

"It is a pity that you should die with your beauty," said the dwarf in the same unemotional way. "But you are like the others—you know too much. So I bid you farewell—like this!"

He bent suddenly and kissed her full on the mouth; and Leonard Crockford's chair creaked with his mad struggling.

"You disgusting blot! You foul, slimy, crawling—"

Sleat let go the girl and shuffled across to him.

"As for you," he croaked, "you also know too much. And you also are too funny. I bid you farewell—like this!"

His fist struck Leonard on the mouth, half-stunning him; but through a reeling red haze Leonard heard the Saint's voice ring out like the voice of a trumpet.

"Wait, Sleat! You lose!"

Sleat limped round. And the glowing end of the fuse was stealing across the bare floor like the eye of a retreating worm.

"Why do I lose?"

"Because you do," taunted the Saint.

"Why? I'll tell you in about six minutes, just before the fuse blows up. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing before you die with us!"

To Leonard it was all like a nightmare, from which he could have believed that he would wake up in a moment, if it had not been for the pain which racked his face from brow to chin. He could only guess what the Saint must have been suffering, for Simon had never shown it by the flicker of an eyelid.

The atom of red light seemed to be racing across the floor at lightning speed. Unless Sleat had underestimated the length of his fuse, or unless there was more of it concealed under the boards—

He could see the Saint's hands behind his chair. The Saint was wrestling with his wrists, but Leonard could not see the knife. The Saint's fingers were in his left sleeve, groping and straining, but nothing seemed to happen.

Then Leonard saw the Saint's fingers stop moving, saw the Saint's fingers relax and his hands sink limply down behind his back, and understood.

The Saint could not reach his knife. For once the trick had failed. The ropes had been tied too tightly, or else the knife had slipped round.

And the saintly smile had never been sweeter.

"Why do I lose?" asked Sleat again.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" jeered the Saint.

Sleat's face convulsed with a spasm of rage. He stared about him and saw the discarded piece of rope. He started to move towards it.

"And if you think that'll help you," came Simon's voice steadily, "you've got another guess due, sweetheart. Torture doesn't make me whine. You ought to have found that out."

The smouldering end of the fuse was only a few inches from the hole in the floor. Four inches at the most—three.

Leonard's head swam. The Saint could only be doing one thing. His trump card had been snatched from him, and he was taking the only revenge that was left. To waste time, distract Sleat's attention, to take Sleat with them into eternity.

Leonard shouted. He knew he was shouting, because he heard his own voice like the voice of another man across an infinite emptiness. He shouted:

"Betty!"

"Leonard darling!"

Her answer came to him as from a vast distance. There was nothing real, nothing. And the glow-worm was slipping into the hole in the floor.

"I love you," said Leonard. "If by any miracle we should ever get out of this—if there's anything—anything afterwards, remember that, Betty!"

"Why can't you hold me?" sobbed the girl pitifully.

Leonard groaned.

"I can't!" he said in a whisper. "I can't! They've tied me too tight. I can't move. I can only look at you. My dear!"

A few feet away, on the other side of the earth, he saw her. And he saw Spider Sleat, moving with what seemed to be an unbelievable slowness, picking up the rope. And he saw the Saint smiling his indomitable smile.

And again the shaft of sunlight, that was the Saint's voice, leapt through the air. And this time it seemed to fall on a bright banner of triumph.

"You're too late!" cried the Saint. "It's too late even for torture, because you can't put out the fuse. It's gone. It's been gone for a minute now. You can't reach it unless you tear up the floor, and you haven't the time for that. You've less than four minutes."

And the Saint's heart was singing with a wild hope.

It was true. Leonard's surmise had been right at first. The Saint had been playing for time, fighting to make Sleat forget the lighting of the fuse and the flight of time, with the grim intention of keeping Sleat there to be hurled with his victims into the black sky. He had played for time, but he had won.

He had seen a way out. The wraith of a chance, but—

"About three minutes now, I should say, Sleat. And you'll never see your diamonds. I'll tell you that, dear one!"

Sleat's lips curled back in a dreadful grimace.

"The diamonds!"

"I found them. I dug them up before I came here. Did you think I'd be such a fool as to forget that? They're where you'll never find them, not if you hunt for the rest of your days. And three minutes isn't enough to make me talk, even if you dared stay to try."

Sleat was at the hole in the floor. His hand was through it. He was trying to force in his arm, but the aperture was far too small. He was scrabbling at the boards with the nails of his other hand, but the boards were fast.

It was a gruesome sight. The man was blubbing and slaving at the mouth like an animal.

"It's no good, Sleat," the Saint mocked him. "You've left it too long. You can't reach the fuse—you can't stop the balloon going up—and you'll go with it unless you're quick! But you'll never see those diamonds. Unless—"

Sleat writhed more madly, and then for a moment he lay still, huddled on the floor. Then he drew his hand out of the hole and crawled slowly up to his knees. His eyes seemed blank and sightless.

"Unless what?" he uttered.

Not for a second did the Saint pause, for he recognised the cunning of Sleat's madness.

The slightest faltering would have been fatal, but the Saint did not falter. He played his card—the card that had been sent to him out of the blue by whatever beneficent deity guarded him in all his ways—the wildest, most inspired bluff of his career—and played it without batting an eyelid, as casually, as he might have gambled a bluff in a poker game with a quarter limit.

"Unless you cut us loose, and get us away from here in two and a half minutes," said the Saint steadily.

#### THE TABLES TURNED.

LEONARD heard the words, and his brain throbbed crazily. He understood—he understood at once—but—Surely the Saint couldn't—the Saint couldn't possibly be betting on such a barefaced bluff! Even if it was their only chance, the Saint couldn't imagine that Sleat would fall for a lie like that!

And Sleat was getting up.

And again the wasp stung.

"Seven years of your life!" it gibed. "And a lot of good it's done you, beloved—when you've just arranged to kill the only man who could ever have taken you to your diamonds."

And the Saint laughed as if he hadn't a care in the world—as if they were all a thousand miles away from a land mine that was timed to smitheren them out of life in one hundred and twenty seconds.

Leonard thought: "He might have brought it off, but he's left it too late now. He hasn't a hope in Hades—"

Then he saw Sleat's face working, saw it with a startling clarity, as if through a powerful lens, saw the trembling eyelids and the thin trickle of saliva running down from the corner of his mouth, saw—

*Saw Sleat jerk a clasp-knife from his pocket and fling himself at the Saint's chair.*

Sleat was mad. He must have been. The Saint's barbed taunts, on top of the belief that the Saint had really taken the diamonds and alone knew where they were hidden, must have snapped the last withered shred of reason in his brain. Otherwise Sleat would never have bought the joke. Otherwise Sleat would never have dared take the risk.

If he had been in his senses, he would have known that he hadn't a chance of cutting the Saint free and guarding himself at the same time—even with a gun in his other hand—when his guard had been sent out of hearing. Or did he, in his madness, which the Saint had played on with such a superb touch, think that he could achieve the impossible?

The girl and Leonard and Simon himself knew that they would never know.

But the Saint's hands were free, and the Saint's right hand was flying to his left sleeve, and Sleat was freeing the Saint's right foot. And the Saint's right foot was free. And Sleat, on his knees in front of the chair, was hacking wildly at the ropes that held the Saint's left ankle. The Saint's left foot was—

Simon jerked back his right foot and sent it forward again. The girl gasped.

And Sleat, overbalanced and almost knocked out by the kick, was groping blindly for his gun, which he had dropped, when the Saint kicked it aside and snatched it up.

Leonard's breath came through his teeth in one long sigh.

The Saint's knife was out, and he was beside Leonard's chair. Three swift slashes of the razor-keen blade, and Leonard rose to his feet, free, as the dwarf came at them with clawing fingers.

"Yours, partner," drawled the Saint, as if they were playing a friendly game of tennis, and reached the girl's side in two steps.

The cords fell away in a moment; and, as she came stiffly to her feet, the Saint took her arm and hustled her out of the room. The outer door stood open, and the Saint pointed straight ahead across the dark moor.

"Carry on, old dear," he said. "We'll catch you up in the dip in about one and a half shakes."

Then she was alone.

The Saint went back, and went straight through the room they had left to the room that opened off it. There was a man on the bed, and he did not stir when the Saint came in. Simon folded him in a blanket, and carried him out.

Leonard was climbing shakily to his feet.

"Who's that?" he asked huskily.

"Uncle Sebastian." Simon glanced at the figure in the corner. "Is he—"

Crockford passed a hand across his eyes.

"No. Ought to be, though. I hit him hard enough."

Simon looked into Leonard's face, and saw the grim reaction there. He spoke for commonplace comfort.

"Careless of you, now I come to think of it," he remarked lightly. "It means we'll have to look for the diamonds. Still—we can't stop to weep here. Let's go!"



At the very moment they lifted the bag of diamonds from the hole a gaunt figure loomed in the shadows. It was Inspector Teal.

They went quickly, stumbling over tufts and hummocks in the darkness. Even the Saint, with his instinctive sense of country, tripped once and fell to one knee; but he was up again almost without a check.

A shadow loomed up in the obscurity.

"Is that you?"

It was Betty's voice.

"This is we," answered the Saint grammatically, and walked down into the hollow.

And at the same moment the earth seemed to billow shudderingly under them, like a giant in torment, and with that the giant roared with pain, with a voice like a hundred thunders. And in front of them the darkness was split with a flash of amethyst fire; and it seemed as if a colossal black mushroom blotted out the covering stars as the echoes of the detonation rang from end to end of the sky.

Then the black mushroom became a cloud, and the cloud burst in a torrent of pelting, black rain.

Some seconds later the Saint scrambled to his feet and tried to shake the earth off his clothes.

"Some balloon, you quiet fellow, some balloon!" he murmured appreciatively. "If we'd been in that, I reckon we should just about be on our way down."

They went on with their own thoughts, the Saint with his load, and Leonard's arm about the girl's waist.

After a while Simon stopped, and they stopped with him. He was peering into the blackness at something they could not see. Then he bent slowly, and when he straightened up again there was nothing in his arms.

He touched Leonard on the shoulder.

"Sorry to interrupt again," he said softly, "but between us and the car there are some

specimens I promised to take home for Chief-inspector Teal. If you'll just wait here a sec, I'll ripple over and complete the bag."

He disappeared as silently and swiftly as a hunting panther.

The four men, with Mr. Dyson, were standing in a little group by the car, talking in low voices, when the Saint came towards them in the starlight with Sleat's automatic in his hand.

Simon hated firearms, as has been related, but in the circumstances—

"Good-evening," he remarked affably.

Silence fell on the group like a pall. Then, slowly and fearfully, they turned and saw him only a couple of yards away.

Shrilly, one man blasphemed. The others were mute, staring, dumb with a superstitious terror. And the Saint smiled like an angel through the dried blood on his face.

"I am the ghost of Julius Caesar," he said sepulchral. "and, unless you all immediately put up your hands, I shall turn you into frogs!"

He came a little nearer, so that they could see him more plainly. And slowly their hands went up. Whatever doubts they might have had of his reality, the gun he displayed was real enough. But the fear of death was in their faces.

Then the laughter faded from Simon's eyes, leaving them bleak and merciless.

"You were accessories to torture," he said, "and you might well have been accessories to murder. Therefore, in due course, you will go to prison according to the law. But when you come out—in about three years, I should say—you will remember this night, and you will tell your friends. Let it help to teach you that the Five Kings cannot be beaten. But if I meet you again—"

He paused for a moment.

"If I meet you again," he said, and waved one hand towards the moor, "you may go to the place where your leader has already gone. I dislike your kind—"

He waited, but no one moved or spoke. And the smile returned.

"Meanwhile," said the Saint, "you may step forward one by one and take off your coats and braces, keeping up your trousers by faith and hope. Move!"

While his apparently eccentric commands were being carried out, he called Leonard and directed him. One by one, the men's braces were used to fasten their hands securely behind their backs, and their coats, knotted by the sleeves, hobbled their legs.

"Not a bad day's work," said the Saint when it was done, "but—"

Leonard shot a quick glance of com-

prehension at him, and the girl's hand went out.

"I'd forgotten, old boy—"

"A good day's work, but tough," said the Saint weakly, and leaned against the car.

Leonard drove them back.

The prisoners were decanted at the police-station in Torquay, there to await the morrow and the pleasure of Inspector Teal. There followed a call on a sympathetic physician on the road to St. Marychurch. Finally, they were at the Links Hotel, with the Saint clamouring for beer.

It took some time to convince the manageress that the Saint had recovered sufficiently to be allowed a drink, but it was done. Simon made a pint look like a gill in hot weather, and then he rose to his feet with a yawn.

"Leonard," he said, "if you'll hurry up and tuck Betty into bed, we'll go."

Leonard stared. Leonard said:

"Go?"

"Go," said the Saint. "You know. The opposite of 'come.' There's something I particularly want to do to-night."

"As the bishop said to the actress," murmured the girl.

Gravely the Saint regarded her. Then:

"Betty, old girl," he said, "you'll do. I shall allow Leonard to fall in love with you. Those seven words prove you one of us. I may say that for a girl who's been through all you've been through to-night—"

"But," said Leonard, "you don't mean to go on to Newton Abbot now?"

Simon turned.

"When else?" he demanded. "Teal's due to-morrow. Anyhow, we couldn't assault that garden with spades in broad daylight, looking like retired coal-miners on a 'busman's holiday, when the place is supposed to be closed down. It's to-night or never, son—and I feel we've earned those diamonds. Forty-five thousand to charity, and the odd ten per cent fee for collection—which is one thousand six hundred and sixty-five pounds thirteen and fourpence each—to Dicky Tremayne, you, and me. What price glory?"

Now it should be recorded that at exactly 4.17 a.m. that morning, the Saint's spade struck upon something hard yet yielding, and his hail brought Leonard across the garden at a run. Together they opened the soft leather bag, and examined the stones in the light of a torch.

At exactly 4.19 a.m. their own light was eclipsed by another that leapt on them from out of the darkness, and a familiar voice said: "This is early for you to be up, Mr. Templar."

The Saint closed the bag and rose from the ground with a sigh.

"Late," he said, "is what you mean. Teal, you have an admirable faculty for being on the spot."

"I couldn't wait," said Chief-Inspector Teal slumbrously. "I was kept awake wondering what you boys were up to. So I got out my car and came right down. Let's go into the house and have a chat."

"Yes, let's," said the Saint without enthusiasm.

They went into the house, and Simon had to fight his battle over again. Teal listened—he was a good listener—champing his favourite sweetmeat monotonously. He did not interrupt until the end of the story.

Teal got to his feet mountainously, and looked out of the window. The first wan silver of dawn was in the sky.

"I think," he said, "we might go over to Mr. Crockford's hotel and see if we can find some early breakfast."

And, further, as a matter of history, which the Press has had no opportunity to record, it should be noted that Teal himself, in the Saint's company, deposited the bag of diamonds at the police-station in Exeter at the same time as he transferred the Saint's prisoners there to await their trial at the next assizes the following afternoon.

"You're not going back to-day?" asked the Saint solicitously.

"Not till to-morrow," said Teal grimly. "That's why it occurred to me to leave the diamonds here. If I kept them at the Links, you boys might sleep-walk. I'm going to ask

your Mr. Crockford if I can keep my room on for to-night. There's the explosion to investigate, and one or two other details I must get. I hope it won't inconvenience anyone."

"We shall be delighted," said the Saint truthfully.

At precisely 9 a.m. the following morning, a man in the uniform of the Metropolitan Police marched smartly into Exeter police-station.

"Detective-Constable Hawkins, of Scotland Yard," he reported to the inspector. "I came down with Mr. Teal the night before last on the Policeman case. He's just sent me over to fetch the diamonds he left here and meet him at the railway-station."

"Have you an order?"

The policeman produced a paper. The inspector read it, and then he opened his safe and handed over the bag.

"Better take care of it," he advised. "It's supposed to be worth fifty thousand pounds."

"Blimey!" said the policeman, in understandable awe.

The following morning, Simon Templar was holding a breakfast-party when Chief-Inspector Teal was admitted.

"Have an egg," invited the Saint hospitably. "In fact, have two eggs. Don't go, Orace. We may want you."

Teal sank into a chair and unwrapped a fresh wafer of gum.

"I'll have some diamonds," he said.

"Sorry," said the Saint, "but Hatton Garden is still where it was, and Brook Street remains free of that sordid commerce. You must have got on the wrong bus."

"Your friend Mr. Crockford—"

"Has left us. He's met a girl. You know what these young men are. But if there's any message I can give him—"

"You two are supposed to have come up to London on Friday night, aren't you?" said Teal sluggishly.

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"Why 'supposed'?" he demanded innocently.

"Does anyone else know it except yourselves?"

The Saint leaned back in his chair.

"At eight Ack Emma on Saturday morning, yesterday," he said, "a party of us breakfasted here together."

"At this breakfast," said the Saint, "there were present Mr. Crockford and Miss Bonas, who aren't here to-day to answer for themselves, and also those whom you see repeating the performance this morning—Miss Patricia Holm and Mr. Richard Tremayne. Orace served us. You ask them if that isn't true."

"I see," said Mr. Teal, as if he didn't see at all.

"Therefore," said the Saint speciously, "we couldn't possibly have been in Exeter at nine o'clock on Saturday morning, which I understand is the time when the mysterious policeman removed the swag from the police-station with a forged order."

"How did you know about that?" asked Teal, quickly for him.

"About what?"

"About the policeman taking the diamonds."

"Why," said the Saint indignantly, "I never said anything about a policeman or about the diamonds! Did I, Pat? Did I, Dicky? Did I, Orace?"

Solemnly the three persons appealed to shook their heads.

"There!" said the Saint. "You must be dreaming, Teal!"

Very slowly, Chief-Inspector Teal inclined his head.

"I see," he said, in his monumentally tired way—"I see. The technical name for that is an alibi."

"Do we call it a day, Teal?" said the Saint insinuatingly.

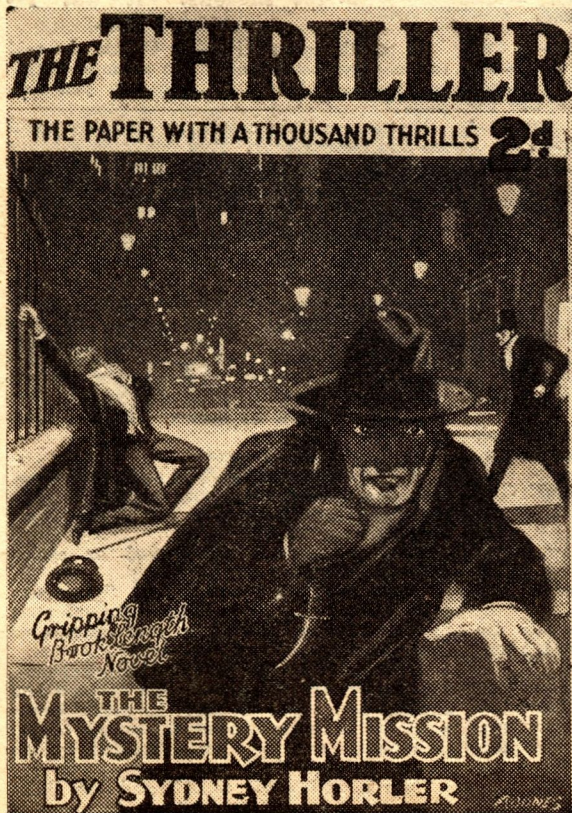
Mr. Teal's jaws continued to oscillate rhythmically, and his round head had not stopped nodding.

"It's a day," said Mr. Teal wearily. "It's a day."

The Saint smiled.

"I hate to see you take it to heart like this," he murmured. "Have an egg!"

## SYDNEY HORLER!



Mr. Horler's story next week is just one big Thrill. From the moment when stark tragedy occurs during the height of a ball at Sir William Barlyk's house, facing Hyde Park, excitement and sensation happen in quick succession. It was from the doorway that David Elvidge saw it happen. A rush, a cry, and a limp object clinging to the railings of the park as the murderer sped away into the darkness. He had dashed across to the motionless figure, whose dying lips had tried to tell him their secret, but death had sealed them before it could be delivered.

That was the beginning of the mystery. What was the cause of this foul crime? What sinister problem lay behind it? Don't, on any account, miss this splendid yarn.

### "THE MYSTERY MISSION,"

by Sydney Horler in next week's special issue of . . . . .

## The THRILLER

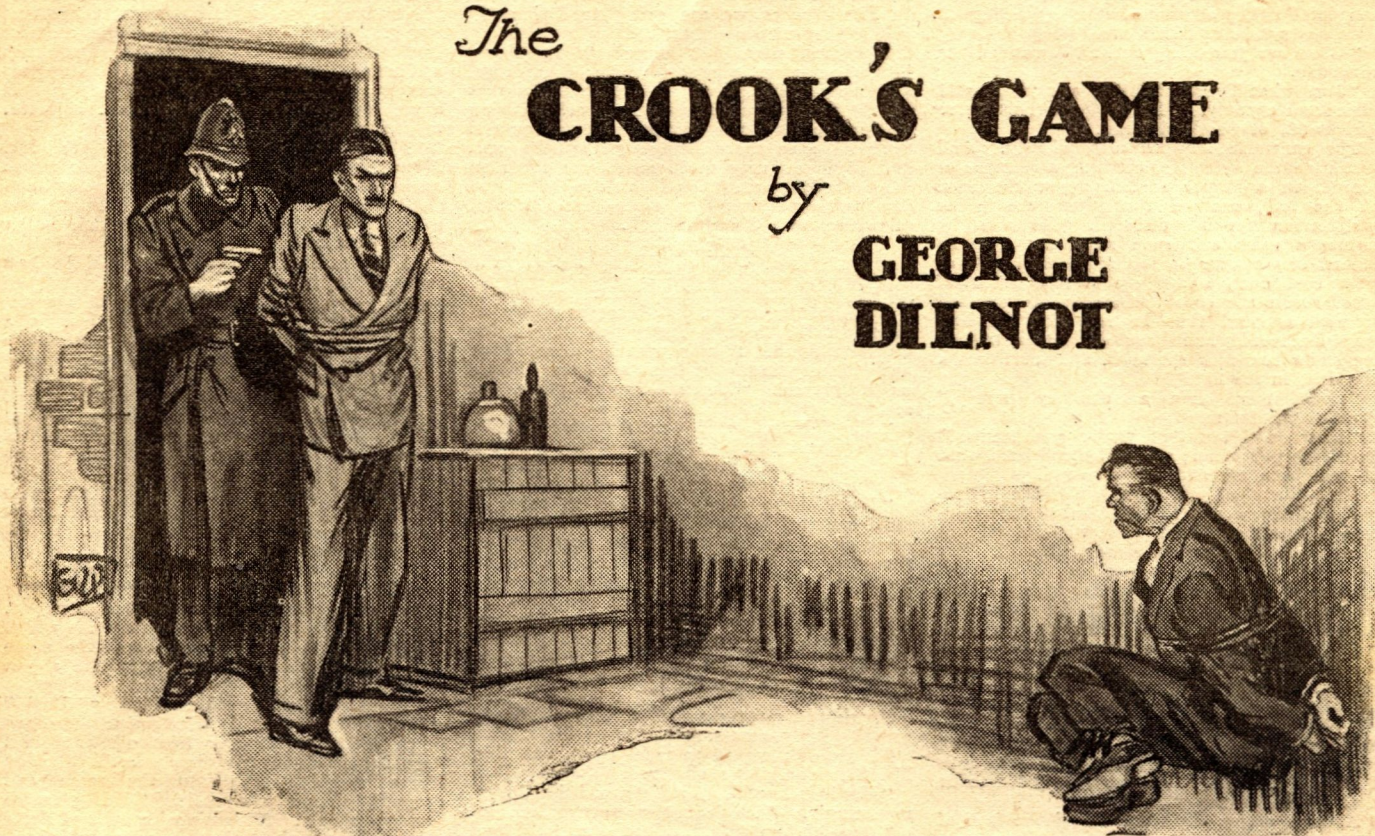
On Sale Next Saturday.

THE END.

## A POWERFUL SERIAL STORY OF CRIME AND DETECTION.

The  
CROOK'S GAME

by

GEORGE  
DILNOT

## THE OPENING CHAPTERS RE-TOLD.

WHEN Mr. Earl Millard and his very charming daughter, Shirley, came to London and took a palatial suite of rooms at the Regal Hotel, they presented the encouraging appearance of rich Americans eager to give themselves a good time. It was known only to Scotland Yard that this gentleman had served a term of imprisonment in an American penitentiary.

Millard left prison a reformed character, and succeeded in going straight for a considerable time. At a time when he was doing exceptionally well in America, an old and regenerate friend, Mr. Solomon Stern, otherwise known as "The Cat," discovered the ex-convict, and blackmailed him under the threat of exposure. Unable to endure the attention of The Cat any longer, Millard decided to leave the States and find refuge in London, only to learn that Solomon Stern was at his heels.

Later The Cat is found murdered on Westminster Bridge. Suspicion at once falls on Millard, otherwise known as Buck Shang, but no trace of him can be found. Later the body vanishes from the mortuary, and Shang's body, too, is taken from the river—apparently murdered.

Detective-inspector Strickland is given charge of the case.

Strickland has an unsuccessful interview with Shirley Millard, who breaks down. That evening, acting on information he has received from a little "nose" named Blowy Bill, the detective goes to a house in Hammersmith where some of the crooks are supposed to be in hiding. He finds the place, however, in pitch darkness apparently deserted, yet there is something sinister—something he cannot fathom.

(Now continue the story.)

## "CAUGHT."

NO gleam of light came from the place—a Georgian house that, in days gone by, had served as the semi-country retreat of some rich city merchant. Strickland was half inclined to leave matters till the morrow. The thing might prove a mare's nest, after all.

But if the place in front of him really housed people who had been concerned in the murder, delay—even for a few hours—might be a fatal mistake. He looked up and down the road for a constable by whom he might send a message to the nearest police station. Not a soul was within sight. If he had just missed the patrol it might be anything from half an hour to an hour before his return. There was nothing for it. The detective resolved on a little preliminary scrutiny.

He crept noiselessly up the steps of the front door, and put his ear to the letter-box. His senses might be deceiving him, but he fancied he heard some movement, some sound of voices. His hand stole to the bell, but he withdrew it almost in the same motion. If they were men who had a hand in the crime, a point-blank approach would only alarm them without serving any useful purpose. Moving slowly and with caution he returned to the pavement. The area gate was padlocked, but it was easy to climb over that. He swore softly under his breath because his coat caught in the spikes.

With some difficulty he disengaged himself and stole down to the basement. With deft fingers he explored the window of what was apparently the kitchen. He dared not light a match. It was securely fastened, and now that he was at close quarters, he was able to observe that old-fashioned shutters had been closed within. That explained the absence of lights, even if anyone was about.

The kitchen door was likewise fastened. But at right angles a wall was built out towards the pavement. Strickland deduced this to be part of a coal-cellar, and, groping with hands outstretched, followed it until he came to a small window at about the height of his chest. It refused to give to his inquiring fingers, but he was well aware that most householders, even if they pay attention to other fastenings, are usually lax about such places. He fiddled and pushed persistently, and presently, applying his weight, heard a slight crack. One of the screws of the fastening had started. He thrust heartily with both hands and the window fell back.

It was a squeeze, for Strickland was broad of shoulder. He heaved himself up and dropped headlong into the velvet blackness within. The place, as he had supposed, contained coals, and he noted that they were very hard and nobbly coals. Conscious of many bruises, he picked himself up and listened intently. The crash with which his entry had been effected seemed to him as if it might have waked the dead. But if anyone had heard his descent they made no sign. He held his breath and waited in a close silence. In two or three minutes he ventured to light a match, but held it only long enough to enable him to get his bearings. Then he picked his way through a scullery and kitchen and, still in the dark, found the stairs leading to the ground floor and the living rooms.

Strickland had nerve. But he felt an uncanny sense of uneasiness as he ascended. He carried nothing that might serve a purpose as a weapon, for, like other detectives, he never bothered to arm himself unless he had a very definite expectation of meeting with violence. He would have been comforted to know that he had a pistol, or even a knuckle-duster in his pocket. It was possible that at any moment he might come in contact with those who had not hesitated at murder.

A low monotone of voices came to his ears as he reached the top of the flight of stairs. He followed a passage in the direction of the sound, and suddenly stumbled headlong over a chair. Before he could recover himself lights flew up. He regained his feet to find himself looking down the blue muzzle of an automatic. Behind the pistol was the stern visage of a tall constable in uniform, who, from the insignia on his collar, Strickland recognised as belonging to the "A" Division of the Metropolitan Police. An extremely fat man and a good-looking woman were beside the constable. "Reach for the ceiling—quick!" ordered the policeman.

"Oh, if you wish to make a melodramatic fool of yourself," agreed Strickland, but his hands went up, nevertheless. Accidents will happen, and he had no desire for posthumous glory, even if conferred by the mutton-headed

stupidity of one of the force. Blowy Bill, he reflected, had led him up the garden. This constable was surely among those who find congenial living accommodation by acting in their spare time as caretakers.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the constable.

"Just what I was about to ask you," said Strickland equably. "I am Detective-inspector Strickland, of Scotland Yard."

The constable laughed incredulously. And just then the detective, catching a glimpse of himself in a mirror that hung at the back of the hall, realised that there was some justification for his disbelief. He was by nature a spick and span man, but now he looked like a tramp. His face was begrimed with coal dust, and there was a smear of blood across one cheek, where he had brushed it with a hand that he now for the first time discovered had been cut. One trouser leg had a four-inch slit in it, and there was a big dent in his hat.

"Look more like a chimney sweep," grunted the fat man.

"How do I tell that you're a detective?" asked the policeman; and Strickland knew that he had been momentarily deceived.

Even the latest-joined recruit of the Metropolitan Police knows that a Criminal Investigation Department man carries proof of his identity in the shape of a warrant card. Yet here was an ostensible member of a picked division of the force who was so ignorant that he did not ask for that card. The detective blessed the chance which had prevented him from falling into a blunder. His mind was moving quickly. He felt that he was in a position of desperate peril, yet he dared give no hint of perturbation.

"Where did you get that uniform?" he asked abruptly. "Why are you masquerading like this? Last time I knew you—this was a shot in the dark—"you were supposed to be a footman—weren't you, Jacky?"

A deep, angry crimson suffused the face of the erstwhile footman, and Strickland was convinced that he had hit the mark. Jacky regarded him with lowering face. "You shut up," he ordered.

"It's no use, you know," said the detective, smilingly disregarding the command. "The place is surrounded. Better give me that gun and be a good boy. The game's up."

For a moment he almost believed that the bluff had succeeded. From the corners of his eyes Jacky looked hesitatingly and questioningly at his companions. The woman had turned white. The fat man alone was unmoved, and he searched Strickland's face with astute little pig-like eyes. Then he waddled a step or two forward and held up a hand.

"Shoot if that grass lifts a finger," he commanded. He listened with fierce concentration and then turned to the inspector with an unpleasant smile. "Clumsy," he sneered. "Think of a newer gag than that next time."

"Have it your own way," observed Strickland. "Only I ask you to consider what sort of a fool I'd be to venture here with no one behind me."

It was easy to see that this was the dominating mind of the trio. Strickland tried vainly to place him in the mental gallery of rogues he ought to know. The effort was vain. He was certain that he had not seen the man before. If their paths had ever crossed he would surely remember a man of such pronounced physical characteristics.

"Say," he went on. "I'm not made of iron. My arms are getting tired."

"Yes." The fat man moved with a swiftness that belied his bulk. In a trice the detective's arms were pinioned behind him, and dexterously secured with a length of line which the other had seemingly produced from his pocket. Resistance, with that pistol staring at him, would have been foolhardy and futile. "There!" He was roughly pushed forward. "If you're not lying—and I think that you are—you'd better pray that no other fool makes an attempt to force a way into this house. Because, if so, you're a dead man."

"Forget the comedy," murmured Strickland.

Jacky was alongside now, and the point of the pistol bored into the detective's ribs. "For

two pins I'd croak him now," he declared ferociously. "Only I want to know who put him up to this."

"That's what we are going to find out," said the fat man ominously.

Strickland permitted himself to be thrust into a back-room, almost destitute of furniture, and closely shuttered. The first thing that caught his eye made him start back with an exclamation. For, propped in a corner, pinioned even more helplessly than he was, and obviously very much alive, was the man whose body was supposed to have been that day recovered from the river—Earl Millard, otherwise Buck Shang himself.

#### TORTURE.

"MAKE yourself at home, Mr. Strickland," said the fat man. "Our furniture is rather scanty, but there is plenty of room on the floor." He gently forced the detective down. A man with his arms bound has difficulty in rising from a sitting posture on the ground. "We have another guest, you see."

"Mr. Shang," said the detective calmly. "I have met Mr. Shang. Now who was the gentleman you dropped in the river, I wonder."

"You'll have plenty of time to think it out," retorted his captor grimly. "We might even drop you in the drink presently, so that you can ask the fishes. That's a matter for consideration. Now I'm going to take a look-see in case you're telling the truth by accident. Jacky's got a nervous trigger finger, so I'd advise you to behave yourself. There may be some other friends of ours here later, and there not so tender-hearted as we are."

He slipped quietly out of the room. Shang smiled grimly across at the detective.

"We didn't expect to meet again like this, Mr. Strickland," he observed.

"Hey! That'll do!" growled Jacky, menacingly. "This ain't no conversazione."

"Aw—let 'em talk," said the woman, and added something in an undertone that Strickland did not catch.

"Thank you, gracious lady," he murmured. "I'll remember that in your favour later on."

There's lots of things that I want to know about." The woman was obviously more alert of mind than Jacky. He had not been flung into the same room as Buck Shang without reason. Although he was still in the dark as to the purposes and motives of the fat man and his gang, he had, in the last ten minutes, come to have some respect for their intelligence. It was more than probable that he and Shang had been brought together in order that some hint of the course the investigation was taking might be gleaned from their conversation.

"Who are your friends?" he asked.

"The prize bullock who has just gone out," observed Shang. "is the king-pin. He calls himself Nares—Sheldon Nares. Heaven knows what his nationality is—British, American, French, German. He'll pass for one or the other. Bit of a mongrel, I guess. When I knew him in the days of my youth he was a receiver, and in his spare time he would put up the money for any crooked game, if it was big enough—forgery, coining, burglary. Never in the picture himself, but drew a rake-off from the men who took the risks. Always kept his own skin safe, though. Don't ask me how he got by the police. Made a fortune; but, being a natural born sucker, lost it in Wall Street. Had to start to get rich quick again, and I suppose he's had to take some chances. Quite likely he was behind that little game Moses and the Cat played on me in Denver. Way I figure it now is this. He knew I was out of the pen, and Moses and he followed me here to wait an opportunity for a big stroke. I'll hand it to him, he has the grey matter all right under his hat. Chief mistake he made was in thinking that I'd be an easy mark. He'd got it worked out clean as a whistle."

"After you left I thought I'd take a breath of air and look at the town. Not going anywhere in particular, you understand. I was strolling along when this bird here"—he indicated Jacky—"pulled me up in a place I think you call the Strand. 'Course, seeing the

uniform put me sound to sleep, as I supposed they'd doped it out that it would. Never entered my head that it was a ramp. Asked me if I was Mr. Millard, and told me that my girl, Shirley, had met with an accident back in the hotel. Got a car all handy to rush me home. Didn't strike me as odd, strangely enough. I stepped in and some guy slipped a bag over my head, and, when I objected, tapped me with a sandbag."

"I woke up here. Mr. Nares and Mr. Moses, if you please, were waiting for me to come out of my dream. Didn't want a thing. Only they kind of hinted that I might like to write them a cheque for five million dollars—roughly a million pounds."

"Kind of suggested that it would be best for my health to see reason. Naturally I argued some. I'll hand it to Nares. He was polite. Said they'd put me aside in cold storage for a while to think things over, before they used a little active persuasion. Somebody or other has been sitting over me with a gun ever since, and now and again offered to sell me a drink of water for a million. When you came in just now they were kind of speeding up their funny little ways of persuasion."

Strickland followed Shang's eyes, and with a thrill of horror noticed a steel poker thrust between the coals of the fire.

"That!" he cried.

"Oh, you were just in time," said Shang placidly. "I was wondering how far they would carry the bluff when you interrupted. Reckon they thought they'd scare me white. Personally I don't believe there's as much guts between them as would galvanise a pint of winkles."

"Don't you worry about bluffing, Buck," said a silky voice. "We'll attend to the show-down pretty soon. This Scotland Yard bird here has been awarded the prize." Sheldon Nares waddled back into the room and dropped back into a chair. "This place is surrounded, eh? It's alive with bulls—I don't think. Not unless they've disguised themselves as lamp-posts or are hiding in keyholes. It strikes me, Mr. Strickland, that you've been a bit of a fool."

"They say there's a sucker born every minute," said Strickland, without emotion. At all costs he had to preserve a pose of equanimity. Even though Nares had found that his story of detectives surrounding the house was false, he would scarcely imagine that there was none who knew of Strickland's purpose in coming there. The detective felt that his life was not worth a minute's purchase with this man if it was discovered that he was playing a lone hand. So long as it was supposed that help might be available at any instant, they would scarcely dare to proceed to extremities. He had to brazen things out as best he might. But till morning, at least, he had only his own wit and resource to rely upon. No one would suspect that he was not safe in bed. In the morning, Winter, Menzies, and the others would move heaven and earth to find him; but in the morning it might be too late, unless he played his cards with skill.

"I gather that Buck was just telling you his pathetic little history," went on Nares. He gave a fat chuckle. "Neat little stunt, dressing Jacky up as a constable, wasn't it? You'll appreciate that. I'm proud of that idea. But it's a pity for me to stop your chat. Go on with your conversation, gentlemen."

"Let's cut this out," said Strickland peremptorily. "You can't get away with this, you know. This isn't the wild west. This is London."

"Sing, birdie, sing," jeered the fat man.

"I'll give you one chance," went on the detective. "You can cut Mr. Shang and myself loose, and we'll give you half an hour's grace to make a get-away."

"Just about the time it would take you to reach a police station," said Nares. "Well, well, I take that kindly. Mr. Buttinsky and friend will kindly allow us to put our necks in a noose. You hear that, ladies and gentlemen. All that he wants to do is to hang us." His tone changed. "No, sir; you were not

(Continued on page 756.)

# The BEECHWOOD TRAGEDY

Problem No. 27 of

## BAFFLERS!

The Popular Detective Story Game.

### THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 27—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 756. 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.

THE shooting of Sir Cuthbert Mallard, the rich recluse, and of his deaf and dumb servant, John Cairns, appeared, at first sight, to be a case of murder and suicide. But Detective-inspector Lockwood, of the Surrey Constabulary, formed another opinion after he had concluded his investigation into the double tragedy.

The details of the case are as follow:

At five o'clock on Sunday morning, October 9th, 19—, P.-c. James, stationed at the village of Beechwood, in Surrey, was returning home to the village after being on duty all night, when, on the extreme outskirts, near to the lonely branch of the Southern Bank, he came upon the body of a man lying close against the hedge. Switching on his electric lantern, he discovered that it was the deaf mute, John Cairns, servant to Sir Cuthbert. He had been dead some hours and had been shot in the back. Upon him the constable found just a watch and chain, a few silver and copper coins and a small key of the Yale pattern.

Carefully marking the spot, P.-c. James removed the body to a near-by shed, and then went up to Beechwood House, with the double intention of informing Sir Cuthbert of the tragedy and of telephoning police headquarters. He found, on arrival, that the front door was wide open. Entering a door in the hall, which also was standing ajar, he received the second shock of the morning.

Lying on the hearthrug in a pool of blood was Sir Cuthbert Mallard. A revolver, fitted with a silencer, lay near his outstretched right hand. There was blood spotted on the table near a bell-push that was a fixture; there was also blood upon a large blotting-pad. The room bore evidences that the baronet had made a fight for life, for a couple of chairs were overturned and the room generally was in much disorder.

Endeavouring to telephone headquarters, the constable discovered that the twin wire connecting it had been cut. Pressing the bell-push on the table nothing happened apparently, but P.-c. James ultimately discovered that it caused a flash-lamp in Cairns' room to light, evidently being the means by which the baronet summoned his deaf and dumb attendant, as he would not have heard a bell.

These were the facts as they were presented to Detective-inspector Lockwood upon his arrival to take charge of the case shortly after nine o'clock the same morning. His in-

vestigations began in the room in which the body of the baronet had been discovered. The doctor had found that Sir Cuthbert had been shot in the left lung, and that he had died from loss of blood; in other words, had bled to death. Some time must have elapsed from the time he was shot until he died.

A search in the room for a pair of scissors or some snips, or even a sharp knife or tool of any kind which could have been used to cut the telephone connection, was abortive of result. One discovery he did make, and that was a pencil on the table, bloodstained, and some impressions on the blotting-pad, evidently caused by someone pressing hard on a pencil whilst writing upon some notepaper.

Careful examination revealed the following:

"... did it. Sendi . . . Cair . . .  
ause wire cut by . . . quickly blee . . .  
th."

That was all.

"Case of a quarrel, I reckon, sir," ventured P.-c. James. "Sir Cuthbert had a terrible temper. Shot his man and then himself after."

Detective-inspector Lockwood did not reply at once. Continuing his investigation, he discovered two sets of motor tyre impressions on the drive outside, and he came to the conclusion that they were made by the same car, which apparently had made two visits, and very recently.

"If Sir Cuthbert shot his servant, James," said Lockwood eventually, "why did he cut the telephone wire? Where was Cairns shot?"

"In the back, sir—bullet touched the spinal cord, the doctor said."

"Could a man shot in the backbone get from here as far as the spot you found him in?" mused the detective. "What's your idea? Where was he going?"

"I thought perhaps he was staggering into the village for help and fell dead on the way, sir. As for the cut wire, I should think that might have been the cause of the row. Perhaps Cairns cut it, either accidentally or not we can't say, and the old man lost his temper. They had a row and Sir Cuthbert drew his gun. Cairns turned to run out of the room and his master shot him from behind. That's how it seems to me."

P.-c. James was rather proud of his deduction. While Inspector Lockwood was examining the body of the servant in the shed, however, an excited clerk from the bank

rushed in to report that the night safe had been tampered with.

The night safe at that branch was similar to those now being installed at many banks throughout the country. Outside the building, set in the solid wall, was a shutter controlled by a key. The shutter connected with a chute which ran down into the vault and gave entrance to a safe. The idea is for the benefit of those traders and other customers who cannot get to the bank with their money to deposit before closing time. They are provided with a key, and are thus enabled to place their money in the custody of the bank instead of keeping it at home.

The inspector discovered that the inside of the safe in the vault was corroded and eaten as though by acid of some kind, whilst a heap of blackened coins lay on the bottom. That was all. Inspection of the steel chute and the inside of the shutter above revealed the same corrosion.

The bank clerk informed him, in answer to his questions, that the chute had only been installed the previous week, and that the only customer who had been provided with a key was Sir Cuthbert, his intention being to use the night safe on Saturdays after Cairns had collected the rents from the cottagers and tenants on the estate. The small key found on Cairns fitted the lock of the shutter, and the presence of the coins proved that he had deposited the Saturday's rents.

A search of Beechwood House revealed little save that Sir Cuthbert had only four rooms in use, the remainder being locked and empty. A will was found in his desk in favour of one Matthew Mallard, a cousin, and his only living relative. Sir Cuthbert described his cousin in the will as a scientist and chemist, and inquiries elicited the fact that he lived at Wealdley, Surrey, a matter of fifteen miles away.

The questions Inspector Lockwood had to answer were:

Was it murder and suicide? (Marks 3.)

Where was Cairns shot—where he was found or in the house? (Marks 3.)

Had the corrosion of the safe and the chute at the back any connection with the tragedy? (Marks 2.)

If it was a case of double murder, who was the murderer? (Marks 2.)

## "The Crook's Game."

(Continued from page 754.)

invited into this party, but now that you are here, we feel that we'd like to entertain you a little. Couldn't think of parting with you so soon. Could we, Jacky?"

"What's the use of playing about?" snarled Jacky. "Get on with the business."

"Yes, let's get on with the business," interposed Shang. "I'm just becoming interested in your methods, Nares."

Without haste, with no appearance of temper, Nares got to his feet, strode towards the millionaire, and struck him violently in the face. Shang fell backwards and made grotesque efforts to regain his balance. He succeeded at last, and a dark red blur on his cheek showed where the blow had taken effect. The fat man stood over him with clenched fist.

"Will that be all from you?" he asked threateningly. "Or do you want some more? How do you like my methods, Buck?" Again he struck and again Shang rolled on the boarded floor. This time he made no attempt to rise and the fat man bent to examine him.

"He's out," he said. "Here, Jacky, give me a hand to cart him out of the way." Baby—he addressed the woman—"you'd better keep an eye on him in case he's shamming."

They half-lifted and half-dragged the unconscious man towards the doorway. "I'd give a good deal to have five minutes alone with you, with my arms free," said Strickland, who for the first time felt his self-control giving way. "I'd smash that ugly face of yours into some sort of shape."

Sheldon Nares grunted.

"You'll sing a different tune in a couple of minutes. I'll be back to attend to you."

The detective contrived to inflect a defiant sneer into his answering laugh. Yet he felt some shadow of fear. He had seen enough to convince him that there was little at which Nares would stop. He was playing for a big stake, and murder—for Strickland was in no doubt that Nares had had a hand in the killing of two men, though he was as yet hazy as to the direct motive—was a mere incident in his plans. If two murders, why not a third or a fourth? To be unable to lift a finger, to be utterly impotent in the power of such a man, chilled the detective, for all that he had his share of resolution and courage. He writhed in a physical effort to free his hands, but they had been too cunningly secured. And all the while he cursed himself for a fool.

If he had not been a tired man, if his brain had not been dulled, he would have never embarked on this enterprise single-handed. He could at least have phoned to the Yard from Victoria. If he had not rushed headlong into this snare, if he had but waited for the constable on the beat—but what was the use of "ifs"?

He had to meet the situation as it existed, and although he knew that his life depended upon it, he could think of no way of extricating himself.

A soft step made him aware of Nares' return, closely followed by the scowling Jacky. A heavy strap dangled from the fat man's hand, and as he saw Strickland's eyes dwell upon it he made it whistle ominously through the air.

"Say," he began abruptly, in his soft voice, "I want to ask you some questions. You'll be wise if you answer them straight away. You've seen the sort of man I am."

"Shoot," said Strickland, with an assumption of light-hearted indifference that he was far from feeling.

"How did you get on to this joint? Don't stop to think out a good lie. Just answer."

"Well," The detective considered the question thoughtfully. "It was like this. In the first place I walked to Victoria. Then I took a ticket on the Underground to Hammersmith. Then—"

The strap descended venomously across his shoulders. "Bit of a humorist, are you?" said Nares. "I'll flay every square inch on your

body if you play with me. Come on. Who has been squealing to you?"

With every nerve preternaturally alert, Strickland fancied that he heard a faint noise, which might have been a woman's muffled scream, from somewhere within the house. A hurried scuffling followed. But, concentrated on their captive, the sound escaped the notice of both Nares and Jacky. A gleam of hope came to Strickland.

He winced under the lash.

"Suppose I tell you everything?" he said, and there had suddenly come a terrified whine into his voice. "Don't hit me again. Will you let me go? What will you do to me?"

"That," answered Nares, drawing the slack of the strap through his left hand, "I will consider afterwards."

The detective was cowering back against the wall, his face distorted in an ecstasy of fear.

"I shall lose my job," he cried tearfully. "They'll kick me out of the service. I'll be a ruined man."

"We'll look after you afterwards if you tell the truth," Nares reassured him.

A convincing shivering fit overtook the bound man. "You—you won't give me away?" he stammered. "I'll tell everything."

No—don't hit me again. I'll do anything you say."

"Pah," said Nares contemptuously. "Sit it out!"

Jacky had stiffened to an attitude of strained attention. Something had reached his ears. Balancing himself against the wall Strickland staggered clumsily to his feet, making considerable noise on the uncarpeted floor. The two men rushed to him and he shook his head. "I'm cramped," he moaned. "Let me stand up. I'll tell it all."

"You can tell it all sitting down," retorted Nares, and, extending a hand, shoved the prisoner so that he tottered and fell with a heavy thud.

He sat up, helped with rough vigour by Jacky.

"I was on this case," he said slowly, "when some information came through to Mr. Menzies—that's the superintendent—from the divisional inspector at Hammersmith—"

"The truth now!" Nares raised the strap in menace.

(What will Strickland tell? Is he going to give the game away? Don't miss next week's gripping instalment of "The Crook's Game." By George Dilot—in The THRILLER.)

## The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

On page 755.

**DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside down.**

Detective-inspector Lockwood decided it was not murder and suicide. His reasons were—  
that a quarrel between a deaf mute and a man possessed of his faculties was not feasible—  
anyway, not a sufficiently violent quarrel such as would lead to tragedy. The cut telephone wire, and the double set of tyre marks in the drive, pointed to a third person.  
He deduced that Sir Culbert was shot, and the assassin fled in the car after cutting the phone wire. The mortally wounded baronet, bleeding copiously, reached over the table and pressed the flash-lamp push to summon Cairns. Whilst Cairns was going to him, he scribbled a note for the servant to take to the village, realising that valuable time would be lost if Cairns had to rely upon being understood. These two actions accounted for the blood on the table and on the blotting-pad. A rough reconstruction did it. Sending my servant Cairns for help because wire cut by—come quickly, bleeding to death."  
The only blanks which could not at the moment be filled were those containing the murderer's name or description. Inspector Lockwood filled them in before the morning was out, however.  
Cairns, he decided, running to the village with the note, was shot in the back by the murderer, who was still lurking near the scene of his earlier crime for some purpose. The servant, dying, managed to reach the bank, unlock the shutter, and put the note containing the murderer's name into the safe keeping of the Southern Bank. Then he fell dead.  
The murderer, unable to stop him, and realising what that note contained, was now desperate. He took the key from the dead man and opened the shutter, to pour corrosive acid down in order to destroy the evidence. The question the inspector asked himself was where, at that time in the morning, did the murderer obtain just the acid he required?  
In answering this question, he found the murderer.  
Matthew Mallard, scientist and chemist, who traced fifteen miles away, and who was from the moment Cairns was shot as follows: The murderer, faced by certain exposure under the hedge and then took the key from him. Motoring home to Wicheley, he obtained the necessary acid, of which he had a stock, together with numerous other chemicals. He returned, poured the acid down the chute, placed the key back in the dead man's pocket, and then, his nerve recovered, went back in the car to Beechwood House to remove any possible clues, and to place the revolver near the dead baronet's hand.  
Matthew Mallard was arrested and he confessed. He and his cousin had a prisonable quarrel in which Sir Culbert drew the revolver. A struggle ensued, in which he gained possession of it and shot his cousin. Even as the latter was pressing the push he cut the telephone wire with some pocket scissors. Then he escaped. The car broke down at the entrance of the drive, and whilst restoring it he saw Cairns running by a short cut to the village. He followed and shot him, but was unable to stop him from putting the note down the chute. The rest of the sordid story was exactly as Inspector Lockwood had reconstructed it.