



**VENDETTA
FOR THE
SAINT**

LESLIE CHARTERIS



VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT

FOREWORD BY IAN DICKERSON

THE ADVENTURES OF THE SAINT

Enter the Saint (1930), *The Saint Closes the Case* (1930), *The Avenging Saint* (1930), *Featuring the Saint* (1931), *Alias the Saint* (1931), *The Saint Meets His Match* (1931), *The Saint Versus Scotland Yard* (1932), *The Saint's Getaway* (1932), *The Saint and Mr Teal* (1933), *The Brighter Buccaneer* (1933), *The Saint in London* (1934), *The Saint Intervenes* (1934), *The Saint Goes On* (1934), *The Saint in New York* (1935), *Saint Overboard* (1936), *The Saint in Action* (1937), *The Saint Bids Diamonds* (1937), *The Saint Plays with Fire* (1938), *Follow the Saint* (1938), *The Happy Highwayman* (1939), *The Saint in Miami* (1940), *The Saint Goes West* (1942), *The Saint Steps In* (1943), *The Saint on Guard* (1944), *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946), *Call for the Saint* (1948), *Saint Errant* (1948), *The Saint in Europe* (1953), *The Saint on the Spanish Main* (1955), *The Saint Around the World* (1956), *Thanks to the Saint* (1957), *Señor Saint* (1958), *Saint to the Rescue* (1959), *Trust the Saint* (1962), *The Saint in the Sun* (1963), *Vendetta for the Saint* (1964), *The Saint on TV* (1968), *The Saint Returns* (1968), *The Saint and the Fiction Makers* (1968), *The Saint Abroad* (1969), *The Saint in Pursuit* (1970), *The Saint and the People Importers* (1971), *Catch the Saint* (1975), *The Saint and the Hapsburg Necklace* (1976), *Send for the Saint* (1977), *The Saint in Trouble* (1978), *The Saint and the Templar Treasure* (1978), *Count On the Saint* (1980), *Salvage for the Saint* (1983)



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SERIES EDITOR: IAN DICKERSON

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The text of this book has been preserved from the original edition and includes vocabulary, grammar, style, and punctuation that might differ from modern publishing practices. Every care has been taken to preserve the author's tone and meaning, allowing only minimal changes to punctuation and wording to ensure a fluent experience for modern readers.

FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION

I must have been around the age of ten when I first discovered this book. It wasn't the first Saint book I ever read, and it certainly wasn't the last, but this one held a certain attraction for me because the edition I came across summed up the story in five words: the Saint versus the Mafia.

I was young and impressionable. I knew about the Saint of the 1930s, and I knew at some stage he would evolve into Roger Moore and subsequently Ian Ogilvy but still, one man—the Saint—versus the Mafia; five words that held so much promise, everything else got abandoned while I read this book.

I loved it. It was everything a Saint novel should be: action, adventure, humor, style...But perhaps noted reviewer Anthony Boucher of the *New York Times* said it best when he reported that “All the old vigor and color is still here. All the grand sweep of adventurous narrative, all the humor and the absurd polysyllables, and the good food and wine—everything that makes Simon Templar such a superb hero of romance.”

Sadly this book now usually gets overlooked in favor of the TV adaptation and subsequent film edit that starred Roger Moore and Ian Hendry. And whilst I wouldn't want to denigrate that production in any way, shape, or form, I have to say the book is better. Because this is the Saint of your imagination, a more ruthless Saint, a swashbuckling devil-may-care adventurer out for justice. Don't get me wrong, Roger Moore did a grand job as the Saint, but whenever anyone asks me who my favorite Saint is, it's the one in my head when I read the books.

As a Saint adventure this stands rightly and proudly alongside many of the classics from the 1930s and '40s.

—*Ian Dickerson*



VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT

There is no doubt that the Mafia is one of the principal causes of the misery weighing on the population in Sicily. Whenever there is an offense to the law, one hears repeated: "That is an affair of the Mafia."

The Mafia is that mysterious feeling of fear which a man celebrated for crime and strength imparts to the weak. The mafioso can do what he likes because, out of fear, no one will denounce him. He carries forbidden weapons, incites to duels, stabs from behind, pretends to forgive offenses so as to settle them later. The first canon of the Mafia is personal vengeance.

We must note that there are families in which the traditions of the Mafia are passed on from father to son, as in the physical order congenital illnesses are inherited. Also, there are mafiosi in every walk of life, from the baron to the worker in the sulphur mines.

Luigi Berti
Prefect of Agrigento
1875



CHAPTER ONE:

HOW SIMON TEMPLAR'S LUNCH WAS DELAYED AND
HIS WARDROBE SUFFERED FOR IT

1

It was the pleasant pause after the *antipasto* when the healthy appetite, only slightly assuaged by the opening course, rests in happy anticipation of good things to come. The *Rosa del Vesuvio* was cool and light on Simon Templar's tongue, and for a few rare minutes in his adventurous life he prepared to surrender to whatever gastronomic pleasures Naples might provide, and tried not to think of certain other distractions for which that city is also somewhat notorious. Somewhere behind him, in the cavernous depths of Le Arcate, the restaurant where he sat, a lobster was leaving the humble ranks of the crustacea and being ushered into the realm of great art in the guise of *Aragosta alla Vesuvio*. This was a moment to be savored and treasured to the full.

Therefore the loud and angry voice which suddenly disturbed his peaceful mood was a gross and egregious intrusion.

"Go away!" it snarled. "I don't know you!" Simon turned a little in his chair for better observation of the tableau, which he had quite disinterestedly noticed as it developed.

The source of the grating voice sat a couple of tables away, a man in at least his late fifties, whose paunchy build was well masked by some superb tailoring in pearl-gray raw silk. Under the coat was a shirt of the finest chambray, clinched at the throat with a hand-painted tie nailed by a diamond pin and at the wrists with cuff-links of ten-carat star sapphires. On one highly manicured finger he wore a massive gold ring, which served to frame a cabochon emerald the size of a pigeon's egg. But in spite of all this expensive elegance, his face was completely nondescript, looking as if it had been roughly thrown together in clay by a rather unskillful sculptor as a base to model a proper portrait on. All its features were untidy except the lipless slit of the mouth and the sparse border of carefully barbered hair plastered down around the gleamingly bald dome.

His companion was perhaps twenty years younger and dressed at less than one-twentieth the cost, with broad shoulders and curly black hair and the looks of any untravelled spinster's conception of a Venetian gondolier, somewhat gone to seed. Intellectually they seemed to have even less in common, for they had hardly exchanged half a dozen words while they were under Simon's indifferent attention. They had finished their meal and were sipping coffee when the third of the *dramatis personae* had arrived.

This one was as obviously English as he was a gentleman. His flannel bags and Harris tweed jacket were of unmistakable origin, and the act of wearing them in Naples in mid-summer proved that their owner, conditioned by damper and chillier climes, stubbornly regarded them as the only correct holiday wear for any country. The cut and texture of the cloth, as well as the hand-rubbed glaze on the conservatively laced shoes, indicated a man of means and good taste within rigidly traditional limits. Yet this was the individual who had, apparently, committed the frightfully un-British solecism of annoying a total stranger.

He had been strolling past the terrace, gazing all around like any tourist, when he had had a delayed reaction, stopped, turned, stared, hesitated, and finally turned in to address the putty-faced

plutocrat who had responded so uncivilly.

—“But, Dino!” stammered the tourist, with acute embarrassment heightening the color of his naturally ruddy complexion. “I know it’s a long time ago, but don’t you remember me?”

“What is this Dino?” The answering growl had an American accent that was incurably Italian at the same time. “I don’t know no Dino. Don’t bother me.”

“I’m Jimmy Euston,” persisted the Englishman, struggling to hold on to his temper and his dignity. “Have you forgotten Palermo? The bank? And that scar on your chin—”

The seated man’s fingers moved involuntarily to an inconspicuous white cicatrice on the side of his jaw.

“You’re crazy with the heat,” he said. “Beat it, before I get mad!”

“Now look here, Dino—”

The response was no more than a flicker of a finger, a fractional movement of the head, but it brought the other man at the table smoothly to his feet. He grasped the Englishman by the arm, and what happened next would have been missed by any spectator but Simon.

Euston’s mouth opened soundlessly, and his red face became white. He bent forward, attacked by a sudden spasm. Simon, to whom such tactics were as familiar as elementary drill to a sergeant, recognized at once what had happened: under cover of the victim’s body and his own, the curly-haired one had delivered a short wicked jab to the solar plexus.

There was more to come. The goon’s arm drew back again, and the cheap striped suiting wrinkled over a bulge of powerful muscles. Once more the contraction came that would send the arm forward again with enough force to crack a rib.

Except that this time the conclusion failed to materialize. If a steel vise anchored to a stone pillar had suddenly appeared and clamped home around the elbow, the arm would have been no more firmly fixed. With shocked incredulity the goondolier turned and gaped at the browned fingers that locked casually on his arm and rendered it immobile. From there his gaze travelled up over the broad chest and sinewy neck to the intruder’s face, the tanned face of a buccaneer with blue eyes that laughed and yet were colder than an arctic sea.

“That’s very naughty,” Simon remarked.

If it had not been for the tenseness of imminent explosion, they would have made an almost comic trio, joined arm to arm like three convivial friends about to burst into song. But there was a far from convivial expression in the yellowed and bloodshot stare of the man whom Simon held, a darkening menace that brought a hopeful smile to Simon’s lips.

“Try it on me, chum,” he invited softly. “Try anything—and I promise you’ll wake up in hospital.”

“*Basta!*” grumbled the man who denied being Dino. “They must be from the same nut-house. Let’s get outa here.”

In an instant the threatened eruption was dissipated. Obediently the bodyguard released Euston, and turned to pull the table aside for his patron. Simon let him go, a trifle reluctantly, but reflecting that what might have been a delightful brawl would probably have been broken up by spoilsport policemen and very likely resulted in his *Aragosta* getting cold while they conducted the post-mortem.

A banknote fluttered down between the coffee cups, and the foppish slob turned his back and walked away, followed by his two-legged dog, and Simon shrugged and looked at Mr. Euston again. The elderly Englishman’s face was still blanched, and beaded with perspiration from the effects of the single cruel blow he had taken.

“Sit down at my table for a minute,” Simon said, guiding him in that direction even while he spoke. “Have a drop of wine.” He poured a glass. “Or something stronger, if you feel like it. That wa

quite a dirty poke you took.”

—“Thank you. I’ll be all right in a jiffy.”

Color returned slowly to the other’s face while he sipped—a little too much, perhaps, Simon realized, as it ripened towards the masculine cousin of a blush. Mr. Euston had not only suffered a public humiliation, but he found himself indebted to someone to whom he had not even been introduced.

“My name’s Euston,” he mumbled unnecessarily. “Jolly decent of you to come to the rescue, Mr.—”

Alternative replies flashed through the circuits of Simon Templar’s mind with an electronic speed developed from much similar experience, to be weighed and compared and chosen from according to the circumstances. He could give his real name, and risk a recognitive “Not the chap they call The Saint? The Robin Hood of Modern Crime? Well, bless my soul!” and so forth. Or he could give one of the aliases to which he had become sentimentally attached—so much so that even some of them ran a fifty-fifty chance of recognition in certain circles. Or he could improvise a new identity—a creative effort which the present situation might hardly justify...So quickly that no one would even have noticed any hesitation, he selected the middle course.

“Tombs,” he said, and won the toss-up gamble. “Sebastian Tombs.” It struck no spark from James Euston. “Think nothing of it. But next time you make a mistaken identification, it might be a good idea not to insist on it too hard.”

“But it wasn’t a mistake,” Euston said, mopping his brow. “I’ll swear he was Dino Cartelli, a chap I worked with in Sicily before the war. I was training for the foreign department of the City and Continental then, and a year at their branch in Palermo was part of the course. Dino worked next to me, and we were fairly good friends. Except for the time when he got that scar.”

“How did that happen?”

“I gave it to him. It was a difference of opinion, Latin temperament and all that, over some girl. He opened a knife and I had to hit him. I wasn’t an amateur champion or anything like that, but my signet ring cut him.”

Simon’s interested regard took a quizzical slant.

“Well, that might account for why he didn’t see you as a long-lost buddy.”

“Oh, no, we didn’t start a vendetta. The girl ran off with somebody else and left us both feeling silly. We apologized to each other and made up, and we were still good friends again when I was sent to another post. And yet now he not only pretends he doesn’t know me, but he—or the fellow with him—they behave like gangsters!”

“They did seem to have some of the mannerisms,” Simon admitted thoughtfully. “Are you absolutely certain you couldn’t have been wrong?”

“Absolutely.”

“After all those years, even a thing like a small scar—”

“I’m positive it was Cartelli, and still more so after hearing his voice. I used to tease him about sounding like a frog instead of a Caruso. No; it only shows you,” said Mr. Euston, taking a brooding refuge in one of the cardinal tenets of a true-blue Briton, “you never really know where you are with foreigners.”

This line of thought was punctuated by the arrival of the lobster that Simon had been awaiting mounted on a wheeled trolley, attended by a retinue of waiters, and trailing clouds of elysian fragrance. He made a hospitable gesture.

“Would you care to join me? We can share this while they fix another one.”

Mr. Euston, however, seemed to feel that he had already shared more than enough confidence for such an informal acquaintance. He pushed his chair back and climbed hurriedly to his feet.

“It’s very kind of you, Mr. Tombs, but I’ve already imposed on you too much. Besides, I don’t think I could eat anything for a while.” He pulled out his wallet and extracted a card. “If you’re ever in London and I can do anything for you, please give me a ring. And again, thanks awfully for your help.”

He pumped Simon’s hand vigorously, turned, and marched firmly away and out of Simon’s world for ever, and with a shrug Simon dismissed the encounter from his mind and devoted to the *aragosta* the whole-hearted attention which it deserved. Mr. Euston’s enlargements on the theme of the nasty surprises which could befall anyone who ventured outside the counties and clans of Albion might have provided a fascinating accompaniment to lunch, but not so much that to be deprived of it would impair his appetite. As for the incident that had brought them together, Simon was still half-inclined to write it off as a simple case of human error. The most interesting feature of it was that Euston had had the bad luck to pick on a character who had all the earmarks of having spent some time in the USA in associations which are not highly approved of by the Immigration Service.

That is, he thought so until the next morning.

Breakfasting in his room, he was trying to utilize the exercise of reading an Italian newspaper to divert his attention from the vile taste of the coffee, without much success in spite of the normal quota of international crises and local scandals. Until he reached a small item low down on the second page.

“TURISTA INGLESE TROVATO ASSASSINATO,” said the headline.

A silent relay closed in his brain, setting off a peal of soundless alarm bells in his inner ear, even before he came to the second paragraph, where the murdered man was identified as James Euston, of London.

2

A number of reasons have been suggested at different times for Simon Templar's superficially incongruous title of *The Saint*, and there may be a kernel of truth in all of them, while not one is the complete answer. The sobriquet is a derivative and outgrowth of so many contributory and contradictory factors attempting to crystallize the supreme paradox of the man himself. But one truly sanctified quality which had never been imputed to him was a forgiving disposition.

James Euston had never been his friend, and probably never could have been. With all his possibly sterling virtues, Mr. Euston had the essential ingredients of a crashing bore. His demise would be no great loss to anyone, except perhaps his nearest kin, if he had any. And Simon had no personal obligation to protect him, beyond a basic civilized responsibility which he had already more than fulfilled. Yet by not taking the Englishman's earnestness seriously enough, and blithely ascribing the gangsterish reflexes of Not-Dino and his bully boy to an almost amusing coincidence, he had let Euston go stumbling off to a death which might easily have been averted. He had been made an accomplice, however unwittingly, in the slaughter of a harmless innocent, and even if his involvement had been unintentional, he could not forgive his own blindness. And therefore he could not forgive the men who had profited by it.

Which meant especially the one who must after all have been Dino Cartelli.

That at least was a viable assumption. In the light of what Simon had witnessed the day before, it seemed as if James Euston's vacation could only have been so violently terminated because he had identified Cartelli. If it had only been an accidental and unfounded resemblance, Euston would not have had to be killed. The newspaper, of course, gave robbery as the obvious motive. Euston's corpse, with its head beaten in and its clothing emptied of cash, had been found in an alley a few blocks from his hotel: it seemed self-evident that he had had the bad luck to be waylaid by footpads on his way home. And such a coincidence could not be ruled out—though all the Saint's instincts, belatedly sharpened as they had now become, rejected it with hoots of derision. To him, the aroma of double-distilled skulduggery had been unmistakably added to the other noisome and omnipresent effluvia of Naples.

Simon settled on those conclusions while he showered and dressed, and when he walked out into the furnace blast of Neapolitan heat it was not for a sightseeing stroll.

It was still too early for lunch, a meal which in Italy never begins before one o'clock and when combined with a necessary nap to aid digestion of the pasta and *vino* can extend into the late afternoon. But at Le Arcate some torpid waiters were sweeping and dusting and setting out arrays of silver and napery in readiness for the activity to come. Without too much prompting, one of them was persuaded to retire to the gloomy back quarters in search of the head waiter.

In a soiled collarless shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and still in need of his first shave, this was a much less august personage than he appeared on duty, but he accepted the off-hour summons with professionally reserved aplomb. He shook hands easily when Simon extended his, and

there was no change of expression when he felt the folded bill in his palm. The paper vanished with the dexterity of many such passings, and he tilted his head with grave attention to learn what small service had been purchased.

“If you remember, I had lunch here yesterday,” Simon began.

“*Sissignore*. I remember.”

“At the same time, there was a man here named Dino Cartelli.”

“The man who sat down with you for a few minutes? I thought he was English.”

“He was. I’m talking about another customer.”

The head waiter’s forehead wrinkled above a perfectly blank face.

“Cartelli? I do not know that name.”

Unless the man was a consummate actor, he must have been telling the truth, and the Saint would usually back his own judgment against any modern electronic substitute. If it was not letting him down, then, Cartelli had not merely been reluctant to be recognized: he had a new name now and did not even want to be reminded of the old.

“An Italian,” Simon said. “In a light gray suit. Heavy, almost bald, with a deep rough voice. He was sitting with a younger man at that table there.”

This time he had even less need of a lie detector, as the man’s eyes swivelled in the direction of the pointing finger and swivelled back again to focus on the Saint with a pronounced diminution of cordiality.

“I do not remember such a man, *signore*. You realize, Napoli is a big city, and this is a busy restaurant. It is impossible to know everyone. *Mi rincresce molto*.”

He escorted Simon to the door, multiplying his protestations of regret, but not saddened enough by his inability to help to be moved to refund the money that had already settled in his pocket.

He would need absolution for perjury before he partook of another Mass, but Simon realized that it would have been a waste of time to discuss this with him.

Outside, the doorman, not yet gorgeous in his coat of office, was stolidly sweeping the night’s debris from the stretch of sidewalk over which he reigned. The Saint approached him and said, “Do you remember a man who was here for lunch yesterday—rather stout, bald, with a grating voice, in a gray suit?”

Folding money between Simon’s fingertips promised gratitude in advance, and the doorman’s hand started an automatic move towards it before the full import of the question drilled into his head. With comprehension came reaction, and his fingers jerked back as if from the touch of a hot iron. He glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, and a drowned-fish expression washed over his face.

“*Non mi ricordo*,” he gabbled. “We have so many customers, I forget all of them.”

He returned to his sweeping with far more industrious concentration than he had shown before.

Simon looked where the doorman’s eyes had swerved, and saw the head waiter still lurking in the doorway. With a shrug of resignation, he turned and strode away.

The visual impression that he had given up lasted only until he rounded the next corner. Then immediately his stride lengthened and quickened as he circled the block to approach the restaurant from the opposite side. This was somewhat easier begun than accomplished, for there are few such things as “blocks” in the American sense in any Italian city—there are only chunks and gobbets of buildings of all ages and stages of decrepitude, intersected by a completely haphazard network of streets and stairways that would seem to have been laid out by a jigsaw puzzle fan rather than a cartographer. Calling upon his sense of direction for a prodigious effort, the Saint managed to achieve his purpose with an accuracy which, in the Africa of H. Rider Haggard, might have earned

him the cognomen of Lord of the Labyrinths, or He-Who-Finds-All-Crooked-Paths. In a surprisingly short time he had completed the meandering detour and was leaning against the wall of the adjacent building, out of sight of anyone who did not step all the way out of the restaurant, as the doorman pushed his broom towards that side with the normal apathy which it had not taken long to restore.

“*Amico,*” said the Saint softly, “would you like to try your memory again?”

His voice froze the pavement sanitizer into immobility. Then, with painful slowness, the man’s eyes travelled all the way up the Saint’s figure from the shoes to the smiling face.

“Now don’t go and have a stroke,” Simon urged him kindly. “Nobody inside can see me, and they need never know I came back. Just prod those brain cells and try to make them give out the name of the gentleman I was asking about.”

“*Non capisco,*” said the doorman hoarsely, and resumed a pretense of sweeping that would scarcely have convinced a five-year-old microcephalic.

The axiom that money talks has its exceptions, but something told the Saint that he had found one individual who would not be permanently deaf to sufficient shouting. This time it was a ten-thousand-*lire* note that he produced and unfolded to the size of a small bedsheet; it shone goldenly in the sun. He refolded it to a small wad and let it drop. The doorman’s eyes followed it covetously as it fell, until Simon’s foot covered it.

“Do you understand that?” Simon asked. “It would be so easy for you to sweep it up.”

“*No!*” was the mechanical answer, but the emphasis was dwindling.

“At least you might tell me somewhere else to ask. The hotel where he stays, perhaps. The driver of the taxi they took from here might have told me that, if I found the right driver. No one will know it was you.”

Beads of sweat broke out on the man’s swarthy face as fear fought with avarice. Simon took out a second ten-thousand-*lire* bill and folded it carefully like the first.

“*Excelsior!*” gasped the doorman huskily.

Simon gazed at him for a long moment, and, when the man failed to unfurl a banner with a strange device and head for the nearest mountain, it became clear that the speaker was not planning to emulate the eccentric youth in the poem but was simply uttering the name of the plushest hotel in Naples.

“*Grazie,*” said the Saint, releasing the second bill, and turned away without waiting to watch it and its predecessor being raked briskly into the little pile of jetsam that the *portinaio* had been maneuvering towards the frontage of the establishment next door.

To some investors it might have seemed inadequate yield for the outlay, since it would not have taken any Sherlock Holmes to deduce that a citizen dressed and bedecked like Cartelli would not be likely to bunk in some obscure *pensione*, but to the Saint it was worth it for the time that could be saved from canvassing alternative *palazzi*—not to mention eliminating the possibility that he resided in an apartment or house of his own. Now, provided the information was true, Simon could make a more positive move.

A green-and-black cab followed after him when he turned into the Via A Falcone, while the driver expounded the advantages of his cool upholstery and dazzling speed over the dusty travail of walking under the noonday sun. Simon succumbed with only token resistance and climbed in, but he was not so blinded by the shady interior that he failed to notice the three hundred *lire* already registered on the meter, nor too proud to draw the driver’s attention to the undoubted oversight. After a brief verbal brannigan during which certain special charges were mentioned, so special indeed that they could not be found in the quadrilingual list of complicated tariffs posted inside the cab, a decision was reached that perhaps the meter should be readjusted, and the chauffeur launched his vehicle through the lunatic traffic with an emotional abandon which suggested that only homicide or

suicide would salve his injured feelings.

—Simon called a premature halt to the ride at a leather-goods shop which he spotted within sight of the Hotel Excelsior. There he bought a handsome gold-bound pigskin cigar case, making no more attempt to stint on quality than a man with his quarry's evident tastes would have done. To him it was only another investment, like the solvent which had opened the doorman's impermanently sealed lips.

He took the case and the same attitude to the *Sale e Tabacchi* a few doors farther on. On some other occasion it might have amused him to engage the tobacconist in a long and profound debate over the selection of a package of salt, which for reasons which may remain eternally obscure to non-Italians is a monopoly of the same government-licensed stores. But that morning he was driven by too much impatience to waste time on anything but the purchase of two of the very best cigars, and the shopkeeper who sold them at the inflated official price never knew what torment he had been spared.

Simon put the cigars in the case and kept the case in his hand as he entered the ornate lobby of the Excelsior, and located the desk of the concierge.

"I believe this belongs to one of your guests," he said. "Would you see that he gets it?"

The attendant examined the case which Simon had laid on the counter, with the olympian detachment befitting his office, which is believed by all concierges to be only slightly inferior to that of the managing director.

"Do you know which one?" he inquired, with a subtle suggestion that his responsibility covered not merely thousands but tens of thousands, and that anyone who did not realize it was probably a peasant.

Simon shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't. I just happened to see him getting into a cab, and heard him tell the driver to come here, and then I saw the case on the ground. I picked it up and yelled at him, but the cab was driving off and he didn't hear."

"What did he look like?"

"Heavy set—about sixty—a little gray hair, but mostly bald—wearing a very fancy gray silk suit—diamond pin in his tie—star sapphire cuff-links—a gold ring with a huge emerald..."

The functionary, who like all his brethren of that unique European order could be counted on to know everyone who had a room in the caravanserai during his tenure, and almost as much about their activities as God, listened with a concentration that progressed from the condescendingly labored to the tentatively perspicacious to the final flash of connection.

"Ah yes! I think you mean Signore Destamio."

The Saint's pause was imperceptible.

"Not—Carlo Destamio?"

"No. The name is Alessandro Destamio." The case disappeared under the counter. "I will take care of it for him."

"Now, just a minute," Simon said amiably. "Why not call his room and ask if he did lose a cigar case? I didn't actually see him drop it, you know. It might have been lying there all the time."

"I cannot ask him at once, sir. He left yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, did he?" Simon did not bat an eyelid. "That's too bad. It was yesterday when I picked it up, of course, but I've been too busy to come by before this. Where did he go?"

"He did not tell me, sir."

It was apparent that the concierge did not warm to that type of interrogation, from the darkening of his face which was quickly masked with a sneer.

"I will ask him when he comes back, sir. He is not a tourist—he keeps his suite here all the

time. If you would like to leave your name and address, I will send you back the case if it does not belong to him.”

And, the impeccable manner implied, if there's any question of a reward, don't worry, I'll see that you get it; you probably need it.

“Don't bother,” said the Saint airily. “If it turns out not to be his, you keep it. Just be careful how you light the cigars, in case some practical joker planted the whole thing.”

It was not, he felt, an entirely discreditable exit, and it left interesting vistas for future speculation.

Besides which, the visit had produced all that he had any right to expect, if not more: a name. Alessandro Destamio.

A hard core of literate Americans who can still read the printed word when they get their eyes un-gummed from the nearest television set would be capable of distinguishing the name of Alessandro Destamio from all the synonyms who have gone down in windrows before the movie cameras. It was a name that had become familiar through much repetition in news reports and popular articles, even to a vast number of people who still had only the vaguest idea of what he actually did. Al Destamio was a member of “The Syndicate,” a nebulous and to most readers still semi-mythical organization which controlled all the lucrative rackets in the United States and a shocking percentage of local politicians. He had not been one of its chief executives, at the rarified elevation of a Luciano or a Costello, but he was at least what might be called a minor cabinet minister—one of those names which can be regularly flagellated by columnists without fear of libel suits, which are intermittently roused by federal officers, and which nevertheless appear seldom or never on a roster of penitentiary inmates, and when they do it is usually because of some technical flaw in their income tax returns.

Al Destamio, Simon clearly recalled, had been one of those unlucky ones a few years before, and had been deported back to his native land after a year’s cure in Leavenworth which only cost the US Government a few thousand dollars more than he was already alleged to have short-changed them.

And yet, back here at home, he was apparently suffering from no shortage of pin-money, and his aura could still inspire terror or loyal compliance among restaurant and hotel employees. An unappreciative Uncle Sam might have given Alessandro the boot, but back in his homeland he was manifestly not washed up. Far from it. In fact, he seemed to command a respect which might have been envied by the Prodigal Son.

At this point the Saint felt that some reliable local briefing on such mysteries might be helpful. Unfortunately there was not a single resident of that city in his slim but strategically indexed address book. Then he recollected that his old friend Giulio Trapani kept a villa at Sorrento, which couldn’t be more than a couple of hours away, to which he retreated for a vacation every summer. Simon could find nothing in the telephone book which he consulted in his garage, and decided at once it would be faster to drive there and conduct inquiries on the spot than to do battle with the Information Service of the Italian telephone system. In less time than he could have initiated a phone call, he was in his car and heading for the famous Amalfi Drive.

But in this case it made no difference. He was able to track down the villa without too much trouble, but *il padrone* had not yet arrived. No doubt he was still skimming the cream of the expense account crop in the Thames Valley. And good luck to him—but Simon wished only gastritis on the beneficiaries.

He lunched regally on *zuppa di pesce* and *calamaretti*, laved with a bottle of Antinori Classico, on the terrace of La Minervetta overlooking the blinding blue sea, and later swam off the rocks below in the same translucent element, and finally drove back to Naples refreshed and

recharged but no wiser than he had been when he left.

—Thanks to the recommendation of a well-meaning friend, the Saint had made his reservation at a more modest hotel than the Excelsior, a short distance farther along the sea front on the Via Partenope. It had turned out to be considerably less luxurious than the class of hostelry which Simon Templar usually chose at that period of his life, but it had been late at night when he arrived, and his room looked clean and comfortable enough, and it had not seemed worth the trouble to go searching for other accommodation for the two or three days which were all he had planned to stay. Its only vital disadvantage as against the more populous and busily serviced competition was one which had not occurred to him at the time and might never have been brought home to him if he had not impulsively befriended the late Mr. Euston.

He helped himself to his key from behind the all-purpose desk which was tended at various hours by the manageress, the porter, the floor waiter, or any chambermaid who was not otherwise occupied, and in between their shifts by a bell with a mechanical button which could be thumped for eventual attention, and took the self-service elevator to his floor. He had just stepped out when a man came running down the corridor in a frantic sprint to catch a ride before the conveyance went down again, and the Saint turned and stared at him with instant curiosity.

Readers of this chronicle who wonder why a man running for a lift should be such an arresting spectacle are only betraying their own limited horizons. If they had taken advantage of the eight-country, twenty-two city, fifteen-day excursion rates offered by the philanthropic airlines, they would know that on the Mediterranean littoral, in summer, nobody, but nobody, runs for an elevator or anything else. Wherefore the Saint took extra note of the pointed face, the rodent teeth, the pencil-line mustache, the awning-striped suit, and a wealth of other trivia not worth recording, before the febrile eccentric squeezed into the lazy-box and disappeared from view.

It had all taken perhaps three seconds, and it was over before a possible significance to the incident could penetrate through his first superficial astonishment. And by the time Simon reached his room, further speculation became unnecessary.

The door was not quite shut, and he only used his key to push it open.

To say that the room had been searched would be rather like describing a hurricane as a stiff breeze, and in fact a hurricane could have gone through it without doing much more damage. Whoever had been there—and Simon no longer had any doubt that it had been the rat-faced man in a hurry—had efficiently and enthusiastically taken it to pieces. Not content with spilling everything from drawers and suitcases, the intruder had hacked open the shoulders and split the seams of some of the finest tailoring of Savile Row. The same blade had slit the linings of valises and playfully pried the heels from shoes, besides exposing the stuffing of the mattress.

Only a person who knew the Saint's fastidious habits would have appreciated the calm with which he surveyed the wreckage and flicked the dead ash from his cigarette on to the midden heap before him.

"*Che cosa fa?*" gasped a voice behind him, and he turned and saw a gaping chambermaid staring in from the corridor.

"If someone stayed on the job downstairs, it might not have happened," he said coldly. "Please get it cleaned up. The clothes that are worth repairing you can give to your husband, or your lover, wherever they will do the most good. And if the manager has any comments, he can find me in the bar."

Fortunately there was Peter Dawson in that dispensary, and a double measure with plenty of ice and just a little water helped to soothe the most savage edge of his anger as well as slaking the thirst which he had incubated on the drive back.

The vandalizing of his wardrobe was only a temporary inconvenience, after all: a telegram to

London would have replacements under way at once, and meanwhile there were excellent tailors in Italy and some of the world's best shoemakers. On the plus side, the last vestige of possibility that Euston's death was coincidental had been removed. And Cartelli, or Destamio, had been concerned enough about Simon Templar's intervention to have ordered a complete check-up on him and a search which could only have had the object of discovering any concealed official—or criminal—association.

A revelation that might have daunted anyone but the Saint was the speed and apparent ease with which he had been found, which indicated an organization of impressive size and competence. He seriously doubted whether even the local police, with all their authority and facilities, could have done as well. But a sober respect for the opposition and the odds had never done anything to Simon Templar except to make the game seem more exciting.

The manager, or the husband of the manageress, eventually made an appearance. He dutifully wrung his hands over the catastrophe, and then said, "You are worried, of course, about the damage done to the bed. Do not think any more about it. I have put in a new bed, and we will just charge it in the bill."

"How nice of you," said the Saint. "I hate to sound ungracious, but as a matter of fact I was more worried about the damage to my belongings, which happened because you make it so easy for robbers to get into the rooms."

The manager's hands, shoulders, and eyebrows spread out simultaneously in a graphic explosion of incredulity, indignation, reproach, and dismay.

"But, *signore*, I am not responsible if you have friends who perhaps do such things for a bad joke!"

"You have an argument there," Simon conceded. "So it might be simpler not to give me a bill at all. Otherwise I might recommend some other playful friends to come here, and they might do the same things in all your rooms." He turned over the bar check, "Oh, and thanks for the drink."

He felt better for the rest of the evening; though he was careful to dine at a corner table and to examine his wine bottle carefully before it was uncorked. The fact that some back-stage Borgia might have spiked anything he ate was a risk he had to take, but in calculating it he had noted that for some abstruse reason poison had never been an accepted weapon of the fraternity of which Al Destamio was such a distinguished member. Simon had often wondered why. It would have seemed so much easier and slicker than the technique of the gun. He had never been able to decide whether the answer was in some code of twisted chivalry, calling for the actual confrontation of the enemy before his extinction, or merely because a spectacular artillery mow-down made more awesome headlines with which to keep other hesitants in line.

But nothing even mildly disturbing happened to him that night, and when the next move came in the morning it was totally different from anything he had anticipated.

When he came downstairs after breakfast and handed his key over the desk, a slight saturnine man in chauffeur's uniform who had been standing near by approached him with a deferential bow.

"Excuse me sir," he said in passable English. "Mr. Destamio would like to meet you, and send me with his car. He did not want to risk waking you up by telephoning, so I was told to wait here until you came down."

The Saint regarded him expressionlessly.

"And suppose I had some other plans?" he said. "Such as going shopping for some new clothes, for instance?"

"Mr. Destamio hoped you would talk to him before you do anything else," said the chauffeur, with equal inscrutability. "He told me to promise you will not be sorry. The car is outside. Will you come?"

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