
XXXVII

THE BLACK KING STRIKES AGAIN

JIMMIE unfortunately was forced to revise his opinion next morning; for signs began to appear that Domani's gang had still a kick or two left.

It began with a telegram delivered while Jimmie was in bed. It had been sent by Betty at 7:30 P. M. the previous day, but had been received in London too late to be delivered that same night. It puzzled Jimmie exceedingly, for it read:

"Please answer my wire of earlier to-day am I to come up—Betty."

"What the devil does she mean by that?" he grumbled to Viv, still only half-awake. "Did you have a wire yesterday while I was out?"

"No."

Jimmie called Joe in and was told that no telegram had been delivered at all the previous day. He mused for a bit and finally sent Joe out with a wire to Betty at Ipfield. In it he asked for an explanation and at the same time told her definitely to stay where she was.

Thereafter he continued to ponder for a while, till suddenly he jumped out of bed and began to dress with energy.

"Why are you getting up so early?" asked Viv, reaching lazily for the morning paper.

"Going to the post-office to make inquiries. This is beginning to look fishy to me. You see, Betty's not the kind of girl who would forget to send a wire and then think she had. In fact, if I wasn't absolutely

positive that Domani's gang cannot possibly know where she is, I'd be worried."

In spite of this Jimmie did begin to feel worried when he heard from the hall-porter that a telegraph boy had certainly been in the building at about one o'clock yesterday and had gone up to the top floor, though of course it was quite possible the wire had been for No. 16 flat opposite. And his worry definitely changed to anxiety as a result of his inquiries at the post-office round the corner.

His name was unusual and the telegraph room distinctly remembered a wire for him and turned up the copy. It had been handed in at Ipfield at 12:05 and received at 12:42, and in it Betty stated she had received Jimmie's letter about Hyslop and asked whether she might have permission to come up to London. Search unearthed the boy who had delivered it, and here Jimmie at last probed the mystery. The boy confessed that he had not delivered it to the flat itself, but to a man he met on the landing just outside. From the fact that this stranger was without a hat and had asked if there was a wire for the name Rezaire, he had naturally assumed him to be the occupant of the flat and the intended recipient of the telegram.

Jimmie thanked everyone, politely assured them that it was quite all right and went away cursing under his breath. He had seen through the trick at once, and realized that one of his opponents—it did not matter who—had been on watch yesterday for the express purpose of intercepting messages by the simple deception of an unsuspecting telegraph boy. Perhaps they had been after the answer to his Alassio cable. It was lucky it had only been a communication of little value. . . . And at that he stopped abruptly, drawing in his breath.

It was not a message of little value. It had been signed Betty and bore the office of origin, Ipfield, upon it. In a word their enemies had ever since one o'clock yesterday been in possession of the name of the place where Betty had hidden herself. And Ipfield was only a small village, easily searched. He breathed again as he recollected that she had been at any rate safe at seven-thirty last night, for she had sent off her second wire, and then once more his heart sank as he realized this offered no hope. The gang could not have located her anyway much before four o'clock and would need time to make their plans, probably preferring the night to put them into force.

He returned to the post-office and sent an urgent wire to his friend the landlord of the Anchor Inn at Ipfield, and then hurried back to confer with Viv.

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He found Viv dressed and waiting for him with urgency in her eyes. Some instinct told him that what he feared had already happened and that in some way Viv already knew.

"Look!" she said, thrusting the morning paper at him and indicating a paragraph.

Jimmie's eye skimmed the headline and brief-sentences here and there:

"Mystery of Vanished Girl . . . little village of Ipfield . . . staying at Anchor Inn . . . had just sent a telegram . . . story of closed car . . . great excitement . . ."

He flung the paper down. So they had got her again, just as he had feared. Even if he had received her second wire last night he could not have done anything—for apparently she had been in their hands only a short while after sending it.

"Bad, isn't it?" said Viv. "How on earth did they know where she was?"

Briefly Jimmie explained. "And how to set about finding her, I don't know."

"She won't be at the Grange anyway."

"No. Or perhaps she may—for that very reason. They may double-bluff. We must keep the possibility in mind. . . ."

Joe entered with another telegram. It was not an unexpected one, for it was from the landlord of the Anchor stating that the young lady had disappeared and would he come down.

"Well, I suppose we must go. I feel absolutely set back by this."

"The police are in it now, I see," said Viv, rereading the paper. "They'll soon be coming to you because of the two wires she sent. You'd better see Gullidge about it at once. And we must phone Naylor before the Ipfield police find out who Betty is and start talking to him. We'll take him down too."

Rezaire had a few brief words with Gullidge to explain all he knew. Then he and Viv in the Wentley collected Naylor and drove down to Ipfield.

Naylor was worried to the point of distraction and needing to be constantly reassured by Jimmie that Domani would not harm his daughter.

"If they touch her, I'll pull the throat out of that oily . . ."

"They won't. They're not that kind. They're simply using her as a trump card to play against us in the last act. . . . And we've got the whole day before us; we may find' out where she is," he concluded, assuming a confidence he was far from feeling.

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But Betty had disappeared without a trace. The post-mistress had spoken to her when she sent the wire; after that she had not been seen. Her absence had not been remarked till she failed to appear at her supper ordered for eight o'clock, and the local police had then been informed. Her handkerchief had been found early that morning in a quiet lane with other signs of a struggle and the mark of car tires. Two villagers remembered seeing a strange closed car apparently waiting in a byroad earlier in the evening; but neither could remember the number, and they even disagreed as to the color. Police inquiries in the neighborhood during the morning had merely resulted in closed cars of every hue and make being seen the previous evening on nearly every road round Ipfield, and the authorities were soon absolutely at a standstill.

Except that he knew who had taken the girl, Jimmie too was equally at a loss. All his investigations were fruitless. Indeed, had he by any extreme stroke of luck found Betty Naylor that afternoon he was confident he would have found Domani and the little man Dakers, and even Hyslop at the same time. He was now very upset indeed about Hyslop; for the continued absence of any news from the young man went to prove definitely that he too must be a prisoner. Hyslop had been discovered and caught, Betty had gone, and Domani had a good hiding place somewhere both for himself and his captives. But where it was Jimmie had not the vaguest idea. Certainly it was not The Grange; Alf Betters had been watching that lonely house all morning and had just wired that everything was normal.

He returned home about seven tired and dispirited. There was still no news there of Hyslop, and Jimmie actually caught himself wondering whether H. H. was alive. Well did he know from his own narrow escape

at Dakers' hands that they would not now stop at murder.

For once he began to experience a feeling of defeat. The invisible Domani's schemes were slowly maturing according to plan and he saw no way of preventing them. To-morrow he must confront Count Giudecca, and yet owing to his inability to trace Betty Naylor that day his adversaries had now another weapon in their hands. It seemed that even his resourcefulness would be unable to achieve victory.

XXXVIII

COUNT GIUDECCA

JIMMIE had only been back from Ipfield three quarters of an hour and was sitting despondently in the study when Captain Bailey called him up.

"Hullo," he said, "I thought you might like to know that Count Giudecca has just arrived here and is dining in one of the private rooms."

"What's he like?"

"Quiet and a bit queer. He seems rather cut up about poor old Domani. But he's a mover all right. He wants to start looking over papers and things with me after dinner. Told me he wanted to get back to Italy right away and that London scares him."

"I bet it does," murmured Jimmie to himself.

"Anyway," Bailey was continuing, "I rang you up because I thought if you cared to come round to-night you could have your talk with him then about his brother and that fellow Dakers. He seems all right himself, but there's something funny in the other business, I'm certain."

"Right, I'll be round at nine," said Jimmie, though to himself he thought that it would be very little use as things were now. "Don't let him know I'm coming till I appear."

He rang off and again relapsed into gloom. He was just mixing himself a stiff whisky-and-soda and preparing to damn the whole world when the bell went again.

To his unutterable amazement he heard Hyslop's voice.

"H. H.!" he cried, and Viv came running in from the drawing-room to listen in. "Thank God you're all right."

"I don't know that I am yet," said Hyslop, and his voice was flat and tired. "Jumping Heavens, laddie, I've had one hell of a time."

"What happened? Where've you been? Where are you? How did . . ."

"One at a time, laddie. You'll find a complete list of the answers to To-day's General Knowledge Questions on page four. Anyway, I can't stay chatting now. I'm still on duty. . . . Look here, you know the A.B.C. shop near the Granada? Meet me there and I'll spill the tale."

Jimmie left the whisky untouched. The sound of Hyslop's cheery voice had of itself banished his despondency. He felt suddenly that things might not be so bad, that perhaps he might yet avoid defeat. While Viv put on a hat and coat he hurriedly rang up Gullidge and warned him that it was possible there might at last be developments in the Black King case.

"You don't mean you've got him?"

"Not yet, Inspector. But I think to-night I may find out exactly where he is. Then it'll be up to you. More kudos for the Yard."

"I shall be grateful enough," answered Gullidge. "Anyway, I'll have men standing by. What about the girl?"

"No news at all. But as I told you this morning, if we land him properly we ought to get her back too."

"Well, good luck, Rezaire."

Jimmie jammed down the receiver, and accompanied by Viv made hurriedly for the lift.

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Jimmie would hardly have recognized Hyslop as the young man who sat at a marble-topped table wolfing a triple order of bacon and eggs. He had great circles of fatigue round the eyes, a four days' beard and his hair, due to the fading dye, was a queer patchy brown.

"You're no oil-painting, H. H.," Rezaire grinned, realizing how glad he was to see him alive and well.

"Did you get pinched?" asked Viv.

"Haven't you had any food since we last saw you?" continued Jimmie, watching the bacon and eggs disappear.

"Oh, yes," Hyslop put away another enormous mouthful. "This is simply the after effects of a bout of sea-sickness, old dear. Hunger is the technical term for it, I understand."

"Sea-sickness? Where have you been?"

"I'll tell you the whole story. Do you know one Count Giudecca?"

"We do," said Jimmie grimly.

"Well, he's in there." Hyslop nodded across to the massive pile of the Granada, aglow with light and luxury. "I've just followed him across from Alassio. Left yesterday afternoon and travelled in the lap of luxury—except that I was letting my beard grow."

"But how did you get there to begin with?"

Hyslop pushed his plate back with a sigh of exhaustion and said:

"I'll start at the beginning. You, mon général, began by telling me to get onto Domani's tail. Well, soon after I phoned you, Domani did a skip. . . . By the way, I suppose the papers have it that he committed suicide?"

"Yes, they have, but we knew better."

"Good! Now little H. H. was on the spot and saw him do it. But little H. H. also saw something no one

else did. A small launch, conveniently passing at the time, surreptitiously picked someone out of the water, and instantly disarmed all suspicion by doing a most impressive search with boat-hooks for about ten minutes. This, as I judged, was to give friend Domani time to change out of his wet clothes in the cabin. So when the fun died down I was still studying that launch like a busy eyeing a night-club. They soon landed Domani unostentatiously on the south side of the river, where a car with some baggage was waiting. I had a taxi by then and followed—to Croydon Aerodrome.”

“Croydon Aerodrome?”

“Yes. And there was a specially hired plane waiting. Next thing I knew Domani had popped up into the night.”

“Good God!” ejaculated Jimmie. “You mean he’s gone out of England after all?”

“Yes. It cost me a quid to find out that he was bound for Paris. Now this is where I had the devil’s own luck. I remembered the Dieppe boat-train left in half an hour, just caught it, arrived Paris at half-past five next morning, and nipped out to Le Bourget Aerodrome. Here I learned that Domani had arrived, late the previous night, and gone into Paris. But his luggage, old lad, had been sent direct to the Gare de Lyon for the 8:00 A. M. train to Italy via Modane. I just had time to get there and pick him up again. Thank God he was so confident, he never once thought he was being tailed.”

“You ought to thank me for having made you take money and passport,” said Jimmie. “Not that I foresaw this.”

“My goodness, H. H.,” said Viv, “what a business!”

“Nothing to the rows I had with ticket inspectors before I could find out where Domani was headed for.”

"Where?" asked Jimmie tensely, feeling suddenly that he knew.

"Alassio, old top. He got there about one P. M. yesterday, drove out to a villa like a prison mortuary and went in. An hour or so afterwards Count Giudecca, a well-known lad in those parts, as I had gathered by then, reappeared and started for London. *But* little H. H. wasn't deceived."

"You mean? . . ."

"I mean," said Hyslop, very seriously, "that Count Giudecca is Domani."

"What!"

"Quite true. Slight disguise, and complete change of manner, but the same chappie."

"Well I'm damned!" gasped Viv, impolitely but emphatically.

"I said more than that when I discovered I had to hump all the way back again."

"But," cried Jimmie, remembering his previous night's cable, "I was informed reliably that Count Giudecca was genuine. . . ."

"Quite correct," chuckled H. H. "That's where his cleverness comes in. The *Count* is all right; I tell you, I made plenty of inquiries out there. But there is *no* real Domani. In other words Domani *is* a Count in his own right."

"Great Heavens!" breathed Jimmie. "I see it all now."

He sat back in silence thinking rapidly. For the first time since he had started on the case, he realized the full cleverness and organizing ability of his opponent. He must from the very start have thought out everything to the last detail. Jimmie now saw the man's life, past, present, and future, as though it were a book. Originally an Italian nobleman, probably impoverished, he had

adopted another name and had risen, first to be maître d'hôtel of the Granada, and then, by purchase, the proprietor. In order to keep this dark, and to avoid recognition when on his annual holiday by those who knew him under more favorable circumstances, he had, with the help no doubt of an accomplice of similar appearance, fostered the illusion of the eccentric Count living in retirement for eleven months of the year and leading a gay holiday life on the twelfth. This also provided him with a complete new life and personality to assume when he should retire from business.

Then at some time had come simultaneously the realization of the ease with which he could disappear, should he find it necessary, and, simultaneously, a recognition of the unique opportunities which his position as maître d'hôtel of a fashionable restaurant gave him for acquiring information about Society. His wonderful ability had still served him in good stead; he had organized the most formidable blackmail gang that had ever baffled the police; and at any time he had a complete refuge and alibi to retire to. True, Jimmie's activities had forced his hand. He had had to plan the suicide and leaving to himself of the Granada; it was not so simple a method of escape as a simultaneous retirement of Signor Domani from the restaurant business and a sudden determination of Count Giudecca to be henceforth gay all the year; but it had very nearly succeeded. . . .

Jimmie rose abruptly. "I think we've got him," he said. "It'll be a near thing because we want a lot and he holds good cards."

"Not so very good, surely."

Jimmie remembered. "H. H., I'm sorry to tell you Betty's gone again."

"What?" He jumped up. "How? When?"

"Last night. Partly her fault, because she was

anxious about you and wired, and they got hold of her hiding place." He rapidly told him of the intercepted telegram.

Hyslop drummed his fingers in agitated fashion. "But what the hell can we do now—if they're holding her?"

"As I said, I *think* we've got him."

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, I have a sort of appointment right now with Count Giudecca," said Jimmie. "I hope it'll end in £20,000 to us and a phone message to Gullidge, who's standing by now. You'd better come with me, H. H."

"What about me?" asked Viv.

"You. Ah, wait." He peered out of the window, for they were sitting near the front of the shop. "You can see the Granada well from here; and you can just nicely see that window." He indicated to her the window of Domani's study, the room which had so nearly been fatal to him.

"Yes, I see it."

"Good. Now a lot depends on you, Viv. H. H. and I are going to face a man who is desperate enough as it is, and who, if he suspects we know that he is really his poor dead brother, will stick at nothing. What I want you to do is this . . ."

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Ten minutes later Captain Bailey, after getting over his surprise at Hyslop's appearance, was greeting them in friendly fashion in his office.

"Now," he said to Jimmie, "you want to see Count Giudecca, don't you? He has just gone to Domani's suite upstairs. He really is a most extraordinary man. He must be an eccentric of the eccentrics. I told you he said he was going to pay his brother's creditors, didn't

I? Well, apparently he opened an enormous account for the purpose at the United London Bank by cable from Alassio”

“Or else he had an account here already,” put in Jimmie.

“Not likely,” said Bailey, and Hyslop smiled covertly. “I mean he lives in Alassio and wouldn’t have an account here; anyway, he told me himself he’d done it by cable two days ago.”

“Oh,” conceded Jimmie gracefully, “if he told you”

“The eccentric part is though that he has instructed them to honor all the outstanding checks given by his poor brother before he died. You know, Domani sent enormous checks to his creditors on the last day; that little bookie, Dakers, was writing about it only to-day. Apparently the Count hates the idea of his brother’s name being dishonored. Italian family pride, I suppose. . . .”

Jimmie exchanged glances with Hyslop as they went up in the big lift. He was marvelling at the ingenuity and organizing ability the great blackmailer was showing. By this action he was, as Jimmie had already surmised, paying his confederates their dues on the breaking up of the gang, but he was at the same time most skilfully dissociating Count Giudecca from his dead brother’s activities, should anything ever now come to light. Jimmie suddenly began to feel doubtful of bringing the fellow to book at all. The other had been too clever in the end. True, he had had the satisfaction of breaking the gang up, but he began to doubt whether he would get the £20,000 which he reckoned he was owed, and which was more important to him than anything else. And—a master stroke—Domani now held Betty Naylor as a counter with which to bargain. Jimmie bit

his lip as he considered the situation, and wondered how on earth he was to tackle it.

"I'll just introduce you. Will you want me to stop?" asked Captain Bailey, limping along the corridor to the closed door which cut off Domani's suite. He paused, hand on knob.

"No," said Jimmie evenly. "I think we'll do our business alone. I'll let you know to-morrow"—he hesitated—"anything I may find out."

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Domani's disguise was wonderful. Indeed it was not so much a disguise as the assumption of a new character altogether. There seemed to be nothing definite, except that the hair, once presumably dyed black, was now iron grey, and yet the man who confronted them in the study was a different person. He had just that resemblance which the stranger would at once disregard on learning that he was a brother. For a moment Jimmie could not believe that he was facing the same man whom he had seen bowing rich patrons to a table in the restaurant below. The little man opposite had a different personality altogether, an air of conscious superiority to the rest of the world, a foreign arrogance of poise; he gave the impression of abounding pride of position. But now, for the first time, Jimmie realized with a little start, he was meeting the far-famed Black King face to face, knowing him as such.

"This is Mr. Rezaire. And Mr. Hyslop! . . . Count Giudecca," Bailey made the introductions, and Jimmie suddenly felt inclined to laugh outright at being thus formally introduced to a criminal with whom he had been at grips for a fortnight and who had several times tried to murder him.

They bowed stiffly and Captain Bailey added to the

Count: "This gentleman wished to see you, sir, upon an important point connected with your late brother."

Then he retired, closing the door. The three men were alone.

"And your business, gentlemen?" began the Italian, whom Jimmie could no longer think of as Domani.

"It is a matter of finance," began Rezaire tentatively, and suddenly saw his line of attack clear. This man had not been hiding in England after all, and so it was one of his subordinates who had kidnapped Betty. Probably he had left instructions that it was to be attempted if opportunity offered. And possibly, therefore, he did not know yet whether the kidnapping had been carried out with complete success, and might be persuaded into believing that Rezaire had discovered where the girl was hidden. In short, he had to be bluffed into this belief, and yet must not be allowed to guess that his opponent knew his real identity. A tricky bit of work!

"Please explain, Monsieur Rezaire!"

"Your brother," continued Jimmie bluntly, "owed me £20,000."

The Count raised his eyebrows at this gross breach of manners and good taste.

"My poor brother"—he spoke reprovingly—"in his last letter said he had given checks to all. . . ."

"Oh, we haven't got any paper to prove our claim, I'm afraid," said Jimmie. "It was more a debt between gentlemen."

Count Giudecca laughed. "Of course I believe you, Monsieur Rezaire, but even among gentlemen, there pass I. O. U.'s."

Jimmie saw that his bluff was developing into a double one. He must act up to the very top of his ability, if he were to put it across. And even while

doing so, he must yet behave as he would be likely to do were he really threatening Domani's brother.

"Count, I am a private detective," he began, making a show of giving information he knew the other in reality possessed. "Your brother, I regret to say, was not always honest."

"Sir!" Count Giudecca simulated a perfect indignation.

"I have proofs. He"—Jimmie was going to say "employed me" but with a flash of his own humor gravely changed it to, "He kept me busy—on detective work, sometimes not too reputable. About the time of his suicide, I was working on an abduction."

"A what?"

"A kidnapping of a girl, a Miss Betty Naylor—on his behalf."

"This is unbelievable!" ejaculated the other, but Jimmie noticed he was intent to hear what he had to say.

"Nevertheless it's true. You can see it in the papers. And I'm the man who did it, and so I know where the girl is," Jimmie continued confidently.

The Count nearly said "You don't," realized it would have given him away, and instead remarked with a half smile which he tried to conceal: "Then it is your duty at once to release her."

"It is also my duty to tell the police. When they find who she is with and who arranged it, it will look bad for your late brother."

"My brother is not concerned in this."

"He will not be if I am paid my £20,000."

Count Giudecca was a perfect actor. He started back and exclaimed:

"But this is sheer blackmail!"

To Hyslop's everlasting credit not a muscle of his face moved.

"Perhaps," said Jimmie. "But you will pay?" He waited, holding his breath. He had reached the crucial point of his double bluff. Already he guessed that the Count did not believe he knew anything about Betty's hiding place. But that did not matter so much. What he was hoping was that the other might decide that it was to his advantage to *pretend* to be deceived. By seeming to accede he might think to buy both the police and Jimmie—who, he naturally assumed, did not know who he really was—out of the whole business and leave himself with a free hand. Which was just what Rezaire wanted. For then the Count would be, all unsuspecting, in his power, for Jimmie, his money safe, could at once call Gullidge in.

But the Count's next words told him he had failed. The other had decided to play his original part out.

"Look here, gentlemen," he said, with great assumption of dignity. "You will get nothing from me by impugning my brother's name. I know my brother lived a strange life—the fact that he worked *incognito* in a restaurant which he owned proves that—and he may have been indiscreet. But"—his eyes were steely—"I have been through all his papers and I can find nothing incriminating of any kind. I cannot believe that you have anything either. You will get no money from me. This tale of a girl—bah! Doubtless by the time I have left this dishonest town again, she will turn up with a perfectly good explanation. Gentlemen, good day!"

Jimmie shrugged his shoulders. "Good day!" he echoed, and went to the door. He had failed.

"Well, that's that, old lad," said Hyslop outside. "He couldn't have put it plainer. You can't touch me, says he, and I've got poor Naylor's kid to stop you trying anything on me. When I'm safe out of the country, back she comes."

"Yes," said Jimmie to Hyslop, as they got into the small automatic lift. "We've come to the end of our plans to get our money. Now it'll have to be the police for him. He thinks he's all right now as Count Giudecca, but he doesn't realize we know he's Domani. I want you to get out at the first floor and go straight to Captain Bailey's office. Phone Gullidge, get him to bring his men round here at once."

"What are you going to do?"

"A few last arrangements. We'll have the Count inside by to-night."

"What an actor that bloke is!" murmured Hyslop, in delighted reminiscence as the lift stopped at the first floor. "To see *him* of all people start back and exclaim: 'But this is sheer blackmail!' was worth thousands. . . . Well, so long!"

As soon as the young man was out of the lift Jimmie shut the gate and continued downward.

Before he reached the ground floor, however, the lift suddenly stopped. He pressed the control but nothing happened and Jimmie swore aloud. Next minute to his amazement the lift began to ascend. It rapidly passed the first floor, nor did the control stud have any effect on its motion. At the second floor it stopped and the gate clashed open. Wonderingly Jimmie stepped out—and suddenly saw two men waiting, one on either side of the lift gate. They were Count Giudecca and Sir Victor Ballarat, and each held a gun half concealed but menacing.

Before he could leap back, Ballarat had swiftly closed the lift gate behind him. Then the Count spoke, and he no longer bothered to adopt the voice of a courteously supercilious nobleman.

"Thanks to a pair of earphones and a listening-in apparatus from this lift to my room—which has often

proved financially profitable to me—I was made aware that you were in possession of the secret of my identity. Another little apparatus for controlling the lift at my will has given me the pleasure of meeting you again. We positively must have a little talk. Will you come into my room and don't try again tricks because, as you know, I'm a desperate and dangerous man."

Two guns pointed and Jimmie perforce obeyed.

XXXIX

DEADLOCK

“WELL,” said Jimmie, as cheerfully as he could, “what’s the big idea?”

He had been relieved of his gun, the door had closed behind him and Ballarat now stood guard there with his automatic. Count Giudecca sat down at the desk.

“You know too much. Too much for my health and for your own.”

“What are you going to do about it?” asked Jimmie, affecting unconcern. That he was in great danger he knew, and he must play for time. Hyslop should be on the phone even now. It would not take long for the police to get round.

“What am I going to do about it? . . . My God, I hate you!” he suddenly flashed, leaning forward and showing his teeth. “You come and break up my business. Have I ever hurt you or blackmailed you before you came into this? Yet you have forced me, even the Black King, to resort to my last trick—how do you say—to wind up my business. And then you ask what I am going to do about it?”

Jimmie began to walk up and down the room, from window to door, and Ballarat watched him intently. Ballarat! thought Jimmie, and cursed himself. If only he had been able to keep hold of that paper, he could have had even this situation well in hand. “Do you think,” he said coolly at last, “you can do anything very much? You have forgotten my friends.”

The Count’s lip curled. “You have fought against

me for all this time and yet you think I am a fool." Jimmie's face went white and he paused by the window. He had just recollected all that had been said in the lift. "Your Hyslop never reached Bailey's office, as I overheard you telling him to do!"

"What have you done to him?"

"Don't worry. He will be safe, if he's good." He spoke rapidly into a house telephone on the desk. "Yes. I was right. Your friend is now in a room close by, all tied up, and he will not be released till I have left the country. But you I shall kill!"

"You've tried that once or twice already," said Jimmie, with dry lips, leaning by the window.

"This time there will be no mistake," began the Count. "You are far, far too dangerous to me to . . ." He broke off abruptly, as with a sudden little snap the window blind near which Jimmie leaned sprang up to its roller, disclosing the reflected glow of Piccadilly. Ballarat jumped nervously at the sound. Next moment Jimmie had taken up a position with his back to the window facing the other two.

The Count was nonplussed. "Do you imagine you can signal to a policeman below?" he asked. "Why, we can shoot you long before you can attract attention. Or are you going to drop out backwards—with of course the same result to yourself? But either fate would require too many inconvenient explanations from me. No. It must be into the gas chamber with you!"

He walked deliberately to the little door and held it invitingly open.

Jimmie did not move.

"Come on," he snarled. "I prefer not to shoot, but . . ."

"You also," Jimmie said calmly, "are giving me no credit for brains. Hyslop is not my only friend. It may

interest you to know that I have my wife posted outside there watching this window. . . . No," he added, as the Count made a sign to Ballarat, "it's no good your sending down to remove her. She herself," he lied nonchalantly, "is being watched by someone else."

"Masters reported that there was a girl there with him before he came in," said Ballarat to the Count.

"Why didn't you tell me?" snapped the other. Then to Jimmie. "Perhaps you will tell me what signal you had arranged to explain that you were safe and that she might go away. Or would you like her to watch you go to your death?"

"I thought you'd want to know that." Jimmie's voice was very cool. "So I arranged one signal only and an unusual one too. Listen! My wife can now see me at this window. Should you, however, pull the blind down again or should I move out of her sight, she will wait five minutes. If at the end of that time I do not rejoin her, she has definite instructions to call up Scotland Yard and tell them that I have been murdered in this room."

There was a silence. Count Giudecca bit his lip. Ballarat's jaw had dropped.

"So you see," explained Jimmie gently. "If I leave this window, even for an instant, mark you, you have but five minutes to see that I get safely down to the street, or else prison for you. . . . Now what about your gas chamber?"

The Count's face went red and then white. And then he said between his teeth: "You're a clever and resourceful man!"

Jimmie bowed. "Same to you."

"It seems," continued Count Giudecca, "that I am being forced to a bargain."

"For God's sake!" put in Ballarat, "don't let him

give us away. We've got to have our money and make our escape whatever happens."

Count Giudecca ignored him. "I admit," he continued, "it would be inconvenient to have the police here just now, even though I don't see what charge . . ."

"Inconvenient!" interrupted Ballarat again. "What a word to use!"

"Be quiet," ordered the Count, "and leave this to me." He sat again at the desk. "Well, Rezaire, let us bargain. Pardon my not offering you a seat, but as we are both agreed you would be more comfortable standing by the window."

"I'll sit if you like," said Jimmie, making as if to move, but the Count hastily waved him back, and Ballarat cried urgently, "For God's sake stay there till we've settled this matter!"

Jimmie smiled to himself at the revelation of the powerful position he had obtained. He blessed his own foresight in making those arrangements with Viv.

"How much do you want?" asked the Count.

"I shall be content with £20,000—the amount you took from my client Naylor."

Count Giudecca gazed at him over his interlaced fingers.

"It's a lot of money. Still for that you will depart from this affair and not bother us any more?"

"Dear me, no. That is simply my fee for all the trouble I've had, or if you like, my bribe for not walking away from this window at this instant."

Giudecca sighed.

"If you did that I think I should kill you," he said. "As well be hung for a sheep. . . . See, the bargaining is not all on one side. However, what will you take to promise to leave me in peace till I have—er—concluded my business and left England?"

Of course I can assure you that the Black King is now no more."

"That I won't promise," said Jimmie deliberately. "It's my duty to do my utmost to bring you to justice. After I've got my money," he added.

"There speaks the ex-crook," said the Count.

Ballarat laughed. "You seem to want both ends of the purse," he sneered.

"You are forgetting," went on Giudecca, "that the sweet little Betty is in my power."

Jimmie hesitated. For the moment he had forgotten it.

"I shall find her," he said.

Giudecca smiled. "Then I was right a short while ago. You didn't know where she was. But a clever attempt to bluff me . . ."

For a moment Jimmie's vanity was tickled:

"If you recall that I then knew who you really were, you'll admit it was more clever than you guessed."

"You're right," said the Count almost admiringly. "I nearly bought you off. However — Here's a bargain! If you will promise me not to take any further steps against me, I will release that girl to-night. Otherwise . . ."

"Otherwise the police will find her!"

"Not before she goes out of the country." He drew a little design on the blotting-paper. "I hate to have to say it, Mr. Rezaire, but I am a desperate man. That girl, I am sure, would do very well on the variety stage—say on a small stage in a Buenos Aires cabaret. There are ways of arranging these things." He smiled in an evil, knowing manner. "She is pretty and would have quite a career before her. . . ."

"You swine!" snapped Jimmie.

"I agree. But for the moment I am dead to all feel-

ing, except a desire for my personal safety. You see, I have a pleasant life awaiting me, with my ill-gotten gains. And I still have the power to do what I say. It is arranged for. So come on now. . . ."

Jimmie thought rapidly, realizing the other meant what he said and was able to carry out his threat. But could he possibly stand calmly by and permit this gang to finish up their operations without interference, forego part of his victory?

True, he would have got his money and he had dispersed them, but he had not got them behind the bars. On the other hand, there was Betty, young, fresh and innocent. He shuddered as he thought of what this arch-criminal had threatened. Justice before legality—but Betty's safety must come even before Justice. He saw he would have to agree;—but could he trust the man?

"How will I know that you will release the girl?"

"I am trusting you, and you won't trust me, eh? However . . ."

He picked up the telephone and gave a London number. Then he turned the receiver towards Jimmie, motioning him to stay at the window. "You can eavesdrop," he said, "and then you will see that it is genuine."

Jimmie heard a young woman's voice, speaking with a faint foreign accent.

"Hullo?"

"Is that you, Marie? It's the Boss."

"Oh, you're back! Everything going all right?"

"Yes. I hear you did your business?"

"We did. She's here. Quite well, but furious. Thinks she's let her lot down. I told her she wasn't to blame really, and that we're too clever for 'em."

"Good. Hold on a minute!" Count Giudecca looked

across at Jimmie. "Do you believe?" he murmured, "or would you like to speak to her yourself?"

"I believe you," said Jimmie, who knew from the voices that this was no prearranged conversation.

"Well?" said the Count.

Jimmie thought rapidly. He would have given a lot to get the gang behind bars—then he thought of the life to which this arch-villain would damn Betty.

"I agree," he said at last.

Count Giudecca smiled, and spoke again into the telephone:

"The girl's part is played. She's to go back. Let me see, you are very near Rezaire's flat, aren't you?" He smiled across at Jimmie and said, "The last place we thought you would look for her. Well, Marie, you'd better take her there. Rezaire—and naturally his bright young friend—would like to know as soon as possible that she's safe. Make your own arrangements for seeing that she does not find out where she has been and who you are."

"Do you mean this? After all my trouble?" said the girl, finally convincing Jimmie of the genuineness of the interview.

"Go on! Do it!" said the Count, and replaced the receiver.

"Good!" said Jimmie. "Now I'd like my money!"

The Count picked up a check book.

"In cash please, Count?"

Count Giudecca shrugged his shoulders. "I have not that amount here. What are you thinking of?"

"Try the secret drawer!" smiled Jimmie.

Giudecca also smiled and pressed the spring. The drawer was empty.

"It's a check or nothing, I fear," said Giudecca.

This was a sudden deadlock, and Jimmie considered

rapidly. Ballarat laughed. Jimmie rounded fiercely on him and he was silent.

"Very well, I will take your check. But if it is not passed?"

"Oh, it will be passed," said the Count, and wrote busily for a moment. There was a little smile on his lips which Rezaire did not like, and he had a sudden brilliant idea.

He looked at the check when it was passed across to him, and then deliberately tore it up.

"What's the idea? Noble renunciation?"

"No, simply, Count, that I'm a suspicious man," said Jimmie.

"Do you think I'd deceive you?"

"I do."

"But what else can I do? I tell you I have no cash!"

Jimmie spoke crisply. "You signed that check 'Giudecca.' Quite all right, perhaps, but I think I should feel happier if you wrote another check in one of your old check books and signed it 'Domani.' And you might write as well by way of corroborative detail a little note, also signed Domani, stating that you are repaying me the big loan I so kindly made you some while ago. The date on each will of course be that of your brother's—er—death."

The Count went suddenly livid and Jimmie knew at once that he had never intended the first check should be paid. But he had been outwitted by one equally clever.

"You have so conveniently arranged," Jimmie went on, "for all the checks your brother wrote on that day to be honored at the United London, that you will hardly be able to stop this one—especially with the supporting letter. You see, dead men do not usually either write or stop checks after their death. Unless

they are prepared to have it known that they have come to life again."

With an oath the other wrote.

Jimmie took the two slips of paper. He scrutinized them carefully, but he knew from the expression of fury on the other's face that this time there was no attempt at deception.

"I'm practically one of the gang now," smiled Jimmie, "getting my check with the rest. However, we understand one another." He bent forward and looked the other in the eyes. "You'd better not try and bump me off either," he said slowly. "We both realize I know a lot and it has occurred to me that with me out of the way a little skilful rearrangement of your plans might convince the police of your innocence whatever accusations I might leave behind me."

"I have taken your word that you will not betray me, you must take mine that I will make no attempt on your life."

Jimmie bowed. "They will both break together," he said. "Now undo my friend Hyslop. Let's see him here before I move from the window."

The Count snapped an order into the house phone and in a few minutes Hyslop appeared in the doorway, a trifle dazed and rubbing his wrists.

"If this isn't the limit," he growled. "After dashing about Europe for four days, to be trussed up like a chicken an hour after I get back. . . . I'm sorry, Jimmie, old boy," he added. "They were too quick for me outside that lift. . . . What's happened about Betty?"

"She's at your flat by now," said the Count.

"Yes," added Jimmie. "We had such a jolly time arranging everything." He saw the little man, Dakers, appear in the doorway beside Hyslop, and looked angrily

at him. "What a pity it's all settled," he snapped. "I should have really enjoyed getting even with you, my friend."

"Same here!" scowled Dakers.

"Well, good-bye all," said Jimmie, and he and Hyslop moved to the door.

"Please don't delay," called out the Count, still standing by the desk.

"We won't, old top," called back Hyslop, "but the stairs this time for me. I'm off lifts!"

At the threshold, however, Jimmie turned back. "There's nothing I should like better, Count, at this moment than to tell you that my wife isn't watching the window at all. But," he added sadly, "she is."

"Go away quickly!" urged Ballarat.

"At least," added Jimmie, as they went, "I hope she is."

XL

FINALE

JIMMIE picked up Viv, hailed a taxi, and then nearly collapsed under the strain of his recent ordeal.

"Everything's due to you, Viv," he kept repeating. "If I hadn't known you were watching down there . . ."

"I watched like a lynx, Jimmie boy," said Viv. "I didn't dare take my eyes off you, and I think I must have ordered seven cups of coffee. The waitress nearly sent for a lunacy expert."

Hurriedly he told her about Betty's release.

"A present for little H. H.," smiled Viv.

"I shall certainly be glad to see her safe again," said Hyslop. "Thank Heaven I never knew she was missing till just at the last."

Jimmie remembered his talk with Naylor and leaned over to the young man.

"H. H.," he said seriously, "in a few minutes you'll be seeing her. It'll be an emotional moment. I promised Naylor I'd say a word to you. It's not my business, but . . ."

"I can guess what you're going to say, old son," returned Hyslop, equally seriously. "I've been thinking the same myself. In fact, I feel I've been rather—well . . ."

"Too human?" suggested Viv.

"Yes. Thoughtless, too, perhaps. I must speak to her."

"Be kind to her, H. H. We know that her happiness doesn't lie the way she thinks at present—but she's too young to realize that."

Hyslop sighed. "Yes, I have been a bit carried away," he said at last. After a few minutes' silence he sighed again. He had made up his mind what to say to Betty.

They reached Somerset Mansions and soon were being greeted by Betty, returned a few minutes before. Then Viv went straight to the study to telephone to Naylor that his daughter was safe and would be with him shortly, while Jimmie retired to the dining-room, tactfully pretending that he must think out what he would say to Gullidge in explanation of the Black King's escape. In the drawing-room Betty and H. H. faced one another.

"Hullo! You're back. Congrats!" began Hyslop. His manner was airily effervescent.

"Yes, thanks," said Betty, tremulously. "I—I'm back."

"Rather, old dear, so I see."

"I couldn't help it this time," said Betty. Her voice was wistful. She had half-expected during the minutes she had waited to see Hyslop again that the first thing he would do would be to take her in his arms and kiss her without a word—and he had merely called her "old dear" and talked platitudes.

"No one's blaming you. Anyway, it's all over. We've busted them up."

"So I gathered. I'm so glad," she replied perfunctorily.

"The only pity is we couldn't get 'em in prison, what?"

Betty, who was seriously considering saying with great casualness, "Well, aren't you going to kiss me?" felt somehow that she couldn't. There seemed to be a wall between her and this young man who had once held her so tightly in his arms, a wall that every moment grew thicker, and she could not understand how it had

got there. Instead she remarked: "Well, I must get back to father," and hoped it would have the same result.

To her surprise Hyslop answered briskly: "Yes, I think you ought. He's very worried."

She lost her temper a little.

"What's the matter with us?" she cried. "We never used to be like this."

"Oh, no, old thing, but business is business."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the Black King's show is over, and our roads part."

"Part!" She felt a sudden chill; then laughed. "You talk as if it were for ever. Of course we shall meet again. We're such—such friends." She had a little difficulty with the last word.

"We *may* not meet again," said the young man gravely.

"Why not?" She faced him mutinously, at last prepared to fight boldly for what was at the moment the biggest thing in her life.

"Oh, better not, don't you know."

"Why are you saying this?" flamed Betty. "You've kissed me—hundreds of times. You've made love to me—passionately. You've made me love you. Terribly. And now you say without any reason that it's better not to see one another again. Why?"

"Because there's only one end to the way we're going on."

"And that?"

"Marriage."

Betty lowered her eyes. Then in a very low voice she said, "Why not?"

Hyslop suddenly dropped his flippant manner and became serious, though he felt she would not understand.

"You see, my dear, I ought to have told you before, but I'm a wrong 'un."

"A what?"

"Listen!" He told her briefly of his earlier life and of the fact that he was in reality a criminal who still owed the penalty. "Which, unlike your father, I shall never pay," he concluded.

Betty was silent. The information had shaken her, he could see.

Then she looked up at him. "I don't care."

"There's your father. Nothing would hurt him more."

"I—I still don't care, care about that, I mean. I should be sorry for him but . . ."

"He's devoted his whole life to getting your name free even of a nominal taint, and you're going to pull it down."

Betty hesitated and turned away. Hyslop furtively wiped his forehead, moist with sweat. He was undergoing a terrific strain.

Suddenly Betty turned back and from her shining eyes the young man knew he had lost—unless he played his last cards. He reverted to his flippant manner.

"Besides," he said airily, though his voice was hoarse, "I don't ever want to marry."

Betty, about to speak, said nothing, and the light went suddenly from her face.

"This detective game's my life and wife, old dear," he rushed on lightly. "I couldn't give it up, and I can't see you doing it too."

"Perhaps I—I might," she faltered.

Hyslop played his final card.

"Well, you can come and live with me if you like."

Betty stared at him incredulously, then with a little sob went past him to the door. At the door she turned and looked back. She half-hoped, even half-believed,

that it was all a dream and that next minute he would be kissing her in his arms. But he did not. It was real.

All he said was:

"Well, bye-bye for the time then. We'll be pals."

"No," said the girl, trying to speak bravely. "I'm afraid not. I don't want to be friends with you."

She went out blindly and at once Jimmie, who had been waiting for her, was at her side.

"I want to go back to father," she said simply.

"I'll take you."

"No, get me a taxi—if it's safe," she added, trying to force a smile. "I'll go alone."

Inside the room Hyslop stared at the floor.

"Damn and blast!" he swore suddenly. Then: "Thank God, Naylor will understand. And she's young: she will too, one day."

As he heard the lift descend he ran out, and by taking the stairs arrived in the hall as Jimmie hailed a taxi. From the concealment of the top of the steps he watched her get in, smile once gratefully at Jimmie—and drive away.

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Jimmie stood there a moment also watching the cab. Intent upon his thoughts he only vaguely noticed that a small car had driven up close by.

Everything that followed happened in an instant. Two men leaped out of the car. Jimmie, turning at the sudden sound of feet, just caught a glimpse of Dakers with a set evil face, and Ballarat behind him. Dakers' hand lifted; something flashed; he heard a little "phitt" which his mind recognized as the sound of a silenced gun; then he had fallen to the ground with a sharp shooting pain in his left arm. . . .

He saw the gun levelled at him again as he lay on the

pavement, and raised his hand to his face with a gasp of terror.

The shot did not come. Instead there was a sharp smack, and the tinkle of a weapon falling to the pavement. Uncovering his eyes Jimmie saw Hyslop standing over him and Dakers reeling back, his set white face now bloody from a blow.

Ballarat, left momentarily in advance of his companion, lost his nerve and turned to fly; but Hyslop made a jump for him and caught him by the knees. Jimmie scrambled up and in spite of his wounded arm made furiously for Dakers, secure in the knowledge that his enemy was now unarmed.

But the little man had had enough. In a second he was back in his car, and leaving his companion to his fate, had slipped the gear lever in and was racing round a corner. In his haste he was on the wrong side and at the same moment a big lorry came thundering round from the opposite direction. There was an appalling crash as the little car crumpled up and turned over on its side, while the lorry with a buckled wheel lurched to an abrupt standstill on an island refuge.

Empty though the street had been a moment before, an excited crowd at once began to gather. Jimmie and Hyslop immediately ran over to the scene, Hyslop, who had quickly jerked Ballarat to his feet, still holding him tightly by the arm.

"I told him not to do it," sobbed Ballarat, nerves a-jangle, but Hyslop shook him fiercely to himself.

"We'll talk about that later! You know nothing now! See! But don't you try to get away! . . . Jimmie, we've got to hang around and be good little witnesses for a minute!"

Jimmie nodded and held his arm out of sight. The pain was not great, for it was only a flesh wound.

A man near him helped up the lorry driver, who had been thrown into the road. There was blood on his face from a slight cut, but he was otherwise only shaken. Dakers lay still, half under the upset car.

"'E was on his wrong side, gov'nor," the driver kept reiterating. "You saw it, didn't you? It wasn't my fault. Right on his wrong side, he was."

A policeman was already there, and at his direction four or five men were lifting the car off Dakers' motionless form. The crowd pressed forward, drew back. Hyslop, however, still kept tight hold of Ballarat.

Dakers was beyond help, his head crushed out of recognition.

An ambulance came clanging up. Names and addresses of witnesses were taken. No one had been there to see the struggle between Jimmie and his assailants; and neither Jimmie nor Hyslop, though willing to state what they had seen of the accident, admitted to knowing the dead man. Ballarat preserved a shuddering silence.

After a short while, Jimmie and Hyslop were permitted to depart and went up to their flat. And Ballarat, unobtrusively but tightly held, went with them.

"Everything all right?" asked Jimmie, in an undertone of Hyslop as they got in the lift, and he was not referring to what had just happened.

Hyslop nodded briefly.

"Rotten for you both," said Jimmie softly.

With an effort Hyslop grinned in his old manner. "What I really need now, old lad, is a stoup of ale; but we must attend to this chappie first. . . ."

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Viv bound up Jimmie's wound, which proved but slight, while Ballarat sat in a chair with his teeth chat-

tering against a glass of whisky, for he had been in a pitiable state of terror. Then at a sign from Jimmie she left the room and he and Hyslop faced their captive.

"So," snarled Jimmie, when Ballarat was more himself, "this is the way your Black King keeps his word, is it?"

The other shrugged his shoulders, but made no answer.

"Very well then. Remember what I said. Our words both break together."

"It'll be no good to you now," retorted Ballarat defiantly, the whisky giving him courage. "He wouldn't have sent Dakers to do it if he hadn't fixed everything. You've lost your chance of getting the police on to us. You see," he added boldly, "he hadn't had word of his yacht then, so he had to bargain with you."

"Ah," breathed Jimmie. He had not thought of that.

"They'll be out of the country before morning. In fact, he's on his way to the yacht now and you don't know where that is."

"Unless," said Jimmie softly, "you tell tales?"

"You won't get me to do that now," said Ballarat obstinately. "I know on which side my bread's buttered."

"We'll see," said Jimmie. "Won't we, H. H.?"

"Yes, old criminal. We're not going to let you get away with a thing like this," said Hyslop, once more as facetious and cheerful as usual to all outward seeming.

"You can't do anything," sneered Ballarat. "Even if you find out where the yacht is, you haven't got enough evidence to land us."

"We might persuade you to change your mind about providing us with all the information we need."

Ballarat looked frightened at the threat, but the fact that he stood his ground showed Jimmie how strong his position must really be. "Even if you make me say

anything it will be useless. There's such a thing as forced evidence; and anyway you're not police officers," he said at last.

Jimmie hesitated. He knew the other was quite right. He had guessed, without Ballarat having to tell him, that the Count even if caught would be prepared by now to refute all accusations he could bring, while any evidence Ballarat might be induced to give, would have to be given properly at Scotland Yard.

"You'd better drop the whole thing," suggested Ballarat more easily. "After all, Dakers is paid out, and you've got your £20,000 safe. . . ."

"Not yet. I've only got a check."

"It'll be honored to-morrow all right. He can't help himself. You were too clever for him there."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Well, I think I'll be off now. Anything else?"

"You've got a nerve," said Jimmie, and bit his lip. This looked like defeat. "Hullo! What is it?" he broke off, as there was a knock at the door and Alf Betters put his head in.

"Wanted to see you, sir."

"I'm busy now."

"Very good, sir. It'll keep. It's only about a letter." He held an envelope in his hand, and Jimmie suddenly grew curious.

"What is it?" he asked.

"This, sir. I got this sent to me about two days ago, and I can't make head nor tail of it. But it struck me it might be part of one of your games. . . . It's all very queer."

Jimmie interrupted him with an exclamation, as the other proffered the envelope. It was a yellow envelope addressed in type to "Mr. Alfred Betters, 10, Somerset Mews, N. W. 1" and of a sudden he recognized it. It

was the envelope he had typed himself to test the Black King's machine on that fateful afternoon. But how had it got to Betters, he wondered, as he took it. The only way he could conceive was that he had put it down on the desk among the few letters he had noticed waiting there ready for the post and that it had been sent off in the course of ordinary routine. But . . .

There was a paper inside it. He drew it out wonderingly, and even as Ballarat gave a startled exclamation and made an unsuccessful grab, he realized himself the full beauty of what had happened.

It was the document which he had taken from the Black King's secret file cabinet, the one which incriminated Ballarat. He remembered how he had picked up the first envelope which came to hand to keep it in, and not unnaturally he had taken the one which he had been using a moment before. Later, everything had been taken from his pockets and placed on the desk for Dakers to examine at leisure, and it was then that it had got included with the other letters. . . .

"Good God!" he ejaculated, as all this came home to him. Then he dismissed Betters and turned to Ballarat.

"How did you get that?" stammered the other, with white face.

"Oh, our agents are everywhere, old lad," put in Hyslop cheerfully. "It's a most important document. What the hell is it, anyway, Jimmie?"

"It's just what I wanted," said Jimmie slowly. "Now, Ballarat, we're going a little journey to Scotland Yard to see my friend Inspector Gullidge. When you get there you can make a decision. Either you do your best to explain to the police all about this paper. Or else you will give them such information as will lead to the arrest of Count Giudecca, alias Domani, alias the

Black King. And when he's arrested I'll burn this, or give it back to you, I swear it."

Ballarat's eyes looked furtively round the room. There was no escape.

"They'll let you off light for turning King's evidence," said Jimmie. "Will you get off as lightly from the other thing?" He moved to the door. "Now we're for Scotland Yard. Anyway—which is it to be when we get there?"

Ballarat licked his dry lips. He was beaten and he knew it.

"I have no option," he said hoarsely. "I'll turn King's evidence."

"I knew you would," replied Jimmie cheerfully.

"So did I," added Hyslop. "But I think at least you might have started back and exclaimed 'But this is sheer blackmail!' So appropriate, old horse!"