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## XVII

### COUNTERED

**J**IMMIE breathed again. He had had some difficulty in convincing the manager of the branch concerned of the United London Bank that he was in reality Jimmie Rezaire, but after that the interview had been most satisfactory. It was soon proved without doubt that the Mr. Rezaire who had opened the account, though very like Jimmie and obviously intended to be taken for him, was actually an unknown stranger.

“His references were all right and his money good,” said the manager, shrugging his shoulders. “What else could we do? We don’t usually ask a man if his name’s his own.”

Jimmie pondered and glanced sideways at Naylor, already a little shamefaced at his recent outburst.

“Any good following up the references?” Naylor suggested. “To see if we can get a clue.”

“Precious little. They’ll be fakes or forgeries for a certainty. You can get them anywhere in London if you know where to go. Our mysterious friends in particular would have people only too willing to help him.”

“Excuse me,” cut in the bank manager a little loftily, “but one was from the manager of a bank.”

“Who?” asked Jimmie eagerly, and then had to laugh heartily, for the name given was that of the manager of his own bank, who naturally had vouched for him. “I think,” he said, after a moment, “that a better chance of a clue would be offered by the account in Vallance’s name at the County & Provinces. We know he’s a crook, and . . .”

"It seems to me," put in the manager again, "that this is a matter for the police." And he reached for his telephone.

But Rezaire stopped him with a gesture.

"Not just yet. It's part of something bigger, Mr. Maydew, and I think we'll wait. After all no money of mine has been stolen, only my name. Now you say that the money was drawn out again in two payments?"

"Yes. All except twenty pounds."

"Can you give me the numbers of any of the notes paid?"

"I think so." He pressed a bell on his desk and in a few minutes Jimmie had a list of the numbers in his pocket.

"These may help," he said to Naylor as he turned to go, "but I doubt it. They're far too clever to leave a clue as simple as that. It's extraordinary how every line we get on to seems to lead nowhere. Good-bye, Mr. Maydew, and thank you."

"Good-bye, gentlemen."

"By the way," Jimmie added, at the door. "This twenty pounds that's left. Can I draw it? Is it mine?"

"I don't know. No, I suppose it belongs to the man—not the name."

"Bother," laughed Jimmie. "Well, he'll never draw it. Or if he does try to, send for the police. Good-bye. . . . And now," he added to Naylor, as they went through the swing doors, "to find out what we can from our Mr. Vallance's account."

. . . . .

At the County & Provinces Bank they did not meet with much success, for bank managers are uncommunicative to strangers. Indeed, they had only got what information they had at the United London from the fact

that the account had been opened in Rezaire's name and that he had been able to prove his identity. At length, however, after much argument and threats of bringing in the police, they ascertained that Vallance's account was simply a blind. It had been opened with a cash deposit of a trifle over the £5000 involved, and the check in favor of Rezaire which Jimmie displayed had come in against it a few days later, being specially asked for by the depositor and handed to him together with his pass-book only yesterday afternoon. There were now only a few shillings left in the account.

"Damn!" swore Jimmie, as he and Naylor retired a trifle despondently. "That closes that avenue, I fear. Never mind. I half expected it; and anyway Vallance is only an underling in the game."

"I can see it all now," said Naylor apologetically, when he and Jimmie were in a taxi on their way back to Portman Square. "I'm afraid they very nearly bluffed me. If you hadn't forced me to reason with you, I should have believed them. After all that check was fairly damning."

"It was. I feel rather flattered you know. Just look at the trouble and expense they've gone to in organizing those two accounts to make you stop financing me."

"Yes. Er—talking of that, Rezaire, now that we understand one another again, hadn't we better go back to the old terms?"

"Not unless you insist," said Jimmie firmly. "I always like a gamble and I'll stick by getting my £20,000 from the Black King. Besides, whatever else turns up you'd have now no reason to doubt me."

"Right," said Naylor, "if you wish. And I owe my daughter an apology too. I'm afraid I lost my temper with her about Hyslop just before you came. She's rather—er—taken with him."

"I've noticed it too."

"I suppose he's a good type of lad? I mean, there's nothing against him?"

Jimmie hesitated. He knew only too well that there was a lot against Hyslop. Hyslop was an ex-criminal who for two years had skilfully evaded the law and who, though living honestly and unlikely now to do otherwise, had never paid the penalty. But that was Hyslop's private affair after all.

"I'm afraid," he said at last, "I can't talk about H. H. I've only known him for two or three years. He certainly is courageous and clever, in spite of his manner."

"Oh, I've seen through his manner by now."

"Well, then I think the matter is between you and him and, of course, your daughter."

"H'm," said Naylor thoughtfully, and got out of the taxi at Portman Square, leaving Jimmie to go on to Somerset Mansions. "Well, my apologies and thanks," he added, and shook hands cordially before going up the steps.

Next minute Jimmie drew his breath in with annoyance. The taxi whirling round abruptly had nearly collided with one behind, and during the brief verbal interchange between the two drivers Jimmie had got a casual glimpse into the other cab.

Its occupant was Masters. In his worry at Naylor's accusation and his eagerness to probe the matter of the check he had forgotten that Masters was watching the Portman Square house; nor had they noticed him as they set out together. The presence now of Masters in a taxi behind showed that he had followed them to the banks, and must have guessed what they had been doing. It also meant that, if he had seen that last handshake, as he must have done, he had gathered without doubt

that they parted friends and that therefore the Black King's plot had failed in its object. In which case they would try to . . . Well, what would they do, thought Jimmie, leaning back in his taxi and lighting a cigarette. He wondered. That the next move would be dramatic, if not violent, seemed to him logical. . . .

He leaned abruptly out of the window and looked back. He could just make out Chalmers, the red-faced expoliceman, unobtrusively on guard outside the house, for his orders were to watch Betty as well as possible. A little farther on Masters now stood. There was something ominous about that little figure, representative of such a clever and unscrupulous organization. Jimmie thought of Betty and wondered whether it wouldn't be better to send her away altogether till the affair was over.

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## XVIII

### BETTY MAKES A JOURNEY

BETTY NAYLOR went to the telephone. "This is Jimmie Rezaire," said the voice at the other end. "Can you come over and see me?"

"If you like," replied Betty. "I say, I'm fearfully glad you convinced father this afternoon."

The voice broke into a laugh. "Yes, it was good, wasn't it? Well, when you come over I've got something very important. Tell your father where you're going; and look here, Hyslop is out sending you a telegram as well."

"What on earth for?"

"Just to convince you this is a genuine message. I shouldn't think you could recognize my voice over the wire—they always sound different. For all you know, this phone message might be part of a plot to kidnap you."

"Oh, I see."

"Well, good-bye. Come over as soon as you get the telegram!"

Betty rang off thoughtfully. She recognized the truth of Jimmie's remark. She also saw with some disgust how inexperienced and foolish she was, how anyone could have deceived her. For the voice had certainly sounded a little strange, might quite easily not have been Jimmie's at all, and yet without thinking or pausing to verify the message, she would have rushed off into some trap. She realized she was not half as clever as she thought, when it came to the test; why, quite

possibly she would have been capable of getting in her hurry into the first taxi that offered.

She looked out of the window and was reassured by the sight of the red-faced Chalmers. Well, at least he was there to protect her from the consequences of any stupidity on her part. Nevertheless she felt much annoyed with herself. If she wasn't more awake than that she would end by letting Rezaire—and H. H.—down very badly.

Hyslop's confirmatory telegram came in about a quarter of an hour. It read quite simply:

"Confirming Jimmie's telephone come over on receipt of this ask Chalmers get taxi Hyslop."

Betty restored her faith in herself to some extent by remembering to verify that the place of handing in was the post-office nearest Somerset Mansions. Then she put on a hat, went out and beckoned Chalmers over. She had smiled at him occasionally to show she knew what he was there for, but she had never actually spoken to him before.

"Going out, miss?" he inquired in a husky voice. "'Ope you'll be careful. There's a funny bloke wiv a taxi been up and down 'ere several times."

"Oh, I shall be careful enough. In fact, I think you'd better get me a reliable taxi off the rank."

"With pleasure, miss."

"And you needn't follow me. I'm only going round to see Mr. Rezaire."

"Very good, miss."

In a few moments he had reappeared from round the corner, hanging on to the outside of a taxi driven by a venerable bearded man who might have sat for a portrait of Moses. Betty gave Chalmers half-a-crown and got in. Glancing back as she drove off she saw Chalmers getting into a taxi behind, and smiled as she realized

that he took his duty very seriously and had decided to follow her according to his orders from Jimmie, in spite of her suggestion that he need not do so.

They whirled northwards, then as they neared Somerset Mansions turned off to the right. For a few minutes Betty supposed that the driver was seeking to avoid the traffic junction at St. John's Wood. But as they continued eastwards she grew a little apprehensive. It was a roundabout way. Could there be anything wrong, she thought. But no, the telegram had verified the telephone message and . . .

She gave a sudden little gasp as she realized for the first time the telegram was really no verification at all—except to anyone as gullible as she had proved herself to be. The same man who telephoned could easily have handed in a telegram and the voice of the man had *not* sounded like Jimmie's, though he himself had disarmed her first suspicion by actually suggesting that point.

She rose in her seat, intending to stop the taxi. Then as she saw the venerable back of the driver she remembered that Chalmers himself, Jimmie's own man, had found him. Chalmers was trustworthy, and—she looked back and joyfully recognized the taxi behind—Chalmers was following. She would get out at once and even if anything were wrong Chalmers was there.

At that moment her own cab turned sharp to the right again into a deserted street and stopped. Fear seized her as she sprang for the door.

But before she could get out, it was flung open and a man with a silk handkerchief held so as to conceal the lower part of his face got in hurriedly from a doorway where he had been waiting. Without an instant's hesitation and before she could even open her mouth to scream, he had clapped a little white pad roughly over her nose and mouth. A sickly smell stole into her nostrils and



she struggled fiercely, kicking out in wild fury against the arm which sought to hold her.

Just as a great dizziness began to pervade her whole being the other door was flung open, and twisting round she saw with infinite relief Chalmers' red face as he scrambled in.

"Help! . . . Chalmers!" . . . she tried to gasp, but to her terrified amazement he only seized her legs and held them down. Her struggles grew weaker, and she lost consciousness.

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## XIX

### FURTHER MOVES

**J**IMMIE and Hyslop stayed in the flat from four o'clock onwards, as they had promised, in case Viv telephoned.

"I shouldn't be surprised if she picked up something for us to work on," said Jimmie, pacing up and down the little room. "Heaven knows we need a little encouragement at this stage. I wish I'd had time to decipher that note-book."

"We'll find other clues," Hyslop reassured him. "For instance you've got the number of the notes drawn out of that account in your name."

Jimmie shook his head. "They'll be no help. I shall only learn that apparently I changed them myself. No, I've got a feeling that this Sir Victor Ballarat clue is the one that's going to help us."

"We know he's the next on their list for blackmail—unless they get scared," said Hyslop.

"I'm not so sure now that he is. I've just had an idea, H. H."

"Cough it up, angel face!"

"Have you ever thought why it is that the Black King is so successful?"

"Brilliant organization, old son."

"Not at all. It's because not one of his people has ever put up a squeak. Generally, in these really big gangs there's someone who tells tales sooner or later, but in this lot, no. And why? Because they don't dare. He's got some hold over each one of them."

"Well?"

"Well, we're agreed that the Black King has got a half-nelson on Ballarat from something out of his rather dirty past. But he may be turning his advantage into service, not money."

"Do you mean that Ballarat himself may be one of the gang?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Hyslop whistled. "In that case we're getting hold of their names and numbers very nicely. We could almost bring out a directory already. Let's see! There's the man called Masters, and our well-dressed little friend who called himself Raeburn. And there's the white-faced Vallance. We've got a fine line on his activities. I mean, he lives in Bayswater, when he's in London, and has low brawls in Hyde Park, and opens and closes banking accounts on the slightest provocation, and does performing ape stunts up rope ladders. . . ."

Jimmie laughed and Hyslop continued, ticking off their adversaries on his fingers.

"Then there's the one whom Ah Sin locked out yesterday. He's probably the chauffeur of one of their cars."

"And there'll be another chauffeur for this second car," murmured Jimmie.

"And there's the girl," said Hyslop, assuming a mock rapturous look. "Oh, boy! The one who changed the money."

"The one you lost at Piccadilly Circus?"

"Yes, old son, if you like to put it that way. Funny, because Piccadilly Circus is where you generally *find* them."

"And don't forget Fred, the bruiser . . ."

Hyslop fingered his head tenderly.

"Dear Fred! I shall remember him for a long time," he announced solemnly. "Well, there's all of the gang we know."

"Except," said Jimmie seriously, "the Black King himself. I'd give a lot to know who he really is. Or which?" he added thoughtfully.

"I don't believe he exists, old horse. I think he's a thingumajig."

"A what?"

"A whatsisname! A you-know-the-thing . . ."

Hyslop was still trying to explain when the telephone bell rang.

"Yes? Hullo!" called Jimmie. "Oh, it's you, is it, Inspector?" he went on as Gullidge, speaking from Scotland Yard, announced his identity.

Gullidge appeared slightly scornful of Jimmie.

"You know those two cars," he began, "the ones of which you gave me the numbers?"

"OR1427 and HB7126? Yes?"

"Well, I don't think your methods are very thorough," he jeered.

"Why not?" asked Jimmie resignedly.

Gullidge never lost an opportunity of trying to show Jimmie how hopeless he was at the game of detection.

"Don't ask me why it's so," continued Gullidge, pointedly misunderstanding him. "Perhaps because it's not so long ago you were being chased all over the country by the police, instead of working with 'em." \*

"Oh come on, Inspector, let's have it," said Jimmie cheerfully. "Whatever the difference between us, I apparently haven't got the same amount of time to waste as you have."

\* For these incidents read "The Trail of Fear" by the same author.

"I don't take so long over things you mean," countered Gullidge; and highly pleased with himself continued: "However, to business. The car HB7126, a green Manchester, belongs to a Colonel Howick Jackson of Aldershot."

"And the other?"

"This is where my little joke comes. The other, a green Manchester too, belongs to Sir Victor Ballarat—the same fellow you wanted particulars of the other day. If you'd asked me to get the number of his car at the same time, it would have saved trouble. . . . Didn't you know it was his?"

"Of course not. Otherwise I wouldn't have asked," snapped Jimmie.

"All right, all right," came the other's voice. "Don't bite me when I help you."

"I'm sorry," apologized Jimmie. Then by way of soothing him down and in gratitude for what was a really valuable piece of information, he went on: "Look here, one good turn deserves another. You're working on that Regent Street assault-and-burglary case, aren't you? Well, I heard from a friend that Streaky White fenced the stuff. Might be worth your while to go and talk to him?"

"Thanks, Rezaire," Gullidge was quite pleased. "Thanks very much indeed. . . . So long!" And he rang off.

"The usual, I gather," said Hyslop. "Swapping rumors with friend Gullidge?"

"It's just as well I can give him a tip now and then," answered Jimmie. "He realizes it, and in spite of his manner he's quite keen to give me all the help I want. And he has done to-day too. The ME1214 car that Viv lost touch with was really OR1427."

"Why not the other?"

"Because the other is very obviously an innocent bystander, so to speak. While OR1427 belongs to Sir Victor Ballarat."

"Does it, by Jove."

"Yes. And that, I think, proves definitely now that he's one of the gang. . . ." He stopped and looked at the young man. "By the way, I hope Viv will be careful. *She* still thinks Ballarat is a victim and she may go and land herself in trouble." He tapped his teeth reflectively, as was his habit when thinking hard. "I wonder what's best to do."

"Perhaps we'll hear something from her soon."

"Yes. But shall we recall her and go on gathering up our clues at this end; or shall we lock up all the flats, leave Joe and Ah Sin behind, and run down there ourselves in the Wentley?"

"Well, what I say is, let's have some food right away! I know it's not time, but if we decide suddenly to go chasing off after the Ballarat-Boy for God's sake let's take full tummies with us. Nothing makes me hate life more than this 'Belly-flap-flap-against-backbone' business when we're on a job."

"Good idea," smiled Jimmie, and ringing the bell gave the order for a meal to Joe Plumer.

"And Joe," added Hyslop. "Bring some bottles of that yellow stuff. What do they call it?—Beer! That's it!"

"Sorry, sir, we're out of beer."

"Out of beer? Not out of *beer*? Well, I shan't play. . . . Dammit, Jimmie, we can't fight without *beer*! Here! Is it all right if I run out and get some?"

"If you're quick."

"Quick's the word, field marshal," said the young man and went.

. . . . .

Hyslop made his purchase and had just come out of the local public house with three large bottles when a girl sidled up to him.

"Nothing doing, old dear," began the young man, thinking it was some fair and frail wanderer; but the girl addressed him by name. He looked closely at her and to his surprise found her face vaguely familiar. Next minute he had remembered. It was the girl who had changed the money on the day Naylor had waited in the Park, the girl of the Black King's gang.

"Hullo!" said the young man warily, transferring the three bottles to his left arm. "Now just what do you want?"

"A word with you," she replied in an educated voice, with just a faint trace of a foreign accent. "All right, don't look so alarmed. I'm not trying to vamp you."

"You wouldn't have any luck."

"I know that. I can't compete against the charming Betty."

Hyslop kept silent with difficulty and waited for her to speak again.

"You like this Betty very much, don't you?" She peered sideways at him with a mocking smile.

"What's that got to do with you?" he asked abruptly, and a sudden fear clutched at his heart that the Black King's gang might have got hold of her. Then he remembered that she was no fool and was forewarned, and moreover that there was a good man on guard.

"You would like her, wouldn't you?" pursued the girl, a sudden seductive note in her voice.

"What *do* you mean?"

"Listen!" she dropped her voice to a conspiratorial murmur. "We can get hold of her for you. We can take her to a house we know of where you can meet her and make love to her. Oh, I'm not suggesting you

should force your attentions on her. But a little ardent persuasion! She's fonder of you than you know. . . ."

"Get to hell out of it!" snapped the young man in icy tones. "You dirty-minded little devil."

The girl laughed.

"You're a poor specimen of manhood!" she taunted. "You know the girl would be willing!"

"If you were a man, you wouldn't dare say things like that," snarled Hyslop, and turned on his heel.

Quick as a flash the woman interposed.

"And you wouldn't dare do anything if I were. You don't dare do anything even now. Look! I've got someone with me."

For the first time Hyslop became aware of another figure in the half-empty street hidden in the shadows close by—that of the burly ex-pugilist Fred, who now stepped forward menacingly.

The hot rage that was still seething in the young man's heart at the outrageous suggestion suddenly saw a target. His right arm was free and without stopping to think he swung round and caught Fred nicely on the jaw. The blow, hard and well-placed though it was, did not discommode Fred in the least; Fred would hardly have grunted if the public house had fallen on his thick skull. But he was slow of brain and so was quite taken by surprise. In his walk of life one generally started a row with a few choice epithets, followed by threatening and depreciatory gestures; and this spark had hit him without formality. He collected himself and squared up.

But Hyslop was ready. He knew he was no match for Fred; moreover his first rage had passed, leaving his mind clear, and he saw the affair for what it was. It was simply an attempt to embroil him in a fight, in which he might be disabled and so out of the way for



a week or two. His clear duty to Jimmie, as well as the better part of discretion, was therefore to extricate himself uninjured. And that would have to be done quickly—for Fred was already crouched for a rush—and Hyslop, experienced in rough and tumble, saw his heavy booted foot drawing back for a damaging kick.

Without one instant's hesitation he seized one of the bottles of beer he carried and brought it down on Fred's skull, conveniently offered. The bottle broke into foam and splinters, knocking a mighty oath of surprise and pain from Fred's lips, and thereafter he sat heavily on the pavement, blood and beer streaming over his astonished features.

At this the girl, whose hand had gone up to her hat, suddenly made a quick rush at him. Her hand flashed down and something viciously scratched his arm. But next minute he was scudding down the street before Fred had collected himself, and before even those who had noticed the trouble could think of intervening.

. . . . .

"And what the hell have you been up to?" demanded Jimmie, noticing the young man's dishevelled appearance.

"An argument with a rude little street boy," replied Hyslop, now, however, in better temper. "And, by Jove, a love-token from a little girl." He withdrew from the cloth of his sleeve a seven inch steel pin which had luckily only just grazed his arm. On the end was a paste ornament which had lately adorned the blonde girl's hat. He described his adventure in detail as they ate their meal and Jimmie listened.

"Of course I see it now," said Hyslop airily. "The girl's job was to get me so hopping mad by that talk about Betty that I'd hit Fred and then, without laying

himself open to a charge of assault, Fred could beat me up. Thank God I collected myself in time, or rather, thank God I had a weapon with me."

"Never go about in future without a bottle of beer," smiled Jimmie.

"What a waste of good beer though! . . . Why are you suddenly looking so pensive, old son?"

"I'm thinking."

"Don't! . . . Have some more beer instead? Fred's left quite a lot."

"That little plan seems rather crude for the Black King's gang."

"Well, what other idea could they have had?"

"I don't say they weren't having a shot at putting you out of action. But also it's quite possible they wanted even more to get your reaction to the chat about Betty. You responded beautifully, according to your own account; therefore they know that you're really pretty keen on that kid."

"Well, what of it?" asked Hyslop defiantly.

"Another rope round our hands, H. H., if they manage to kidnap her. They now know she's doubly valuable to all of us."

"I see," said Hyslop, and sat silent and pondering for some time. Then he sprang up and went to the telephone.

"What now?"

"Well, you've put the wind up me, old horse. They may have gone straight off to get Betty. I just want to make certain that she *is* all right."

"Oh, she must be. Chalmers is a good man. And it isn't too easy to kidnap anyone in London when they're both guarded and forewarned."

"Nevertheless, old son, I think I will ring up. I'm in quite a state of nerves. After all you've just been sitting

here, while I've been indulging in a stirring Bottle versus Hatpin contest. . . ."

. . . . .

"I spoke to the butler and she's not in," said Hyslop, a little while later. "She went out about five-thirty."

"There you are then, my boy; she's not kidnapped."

"If she *had* been, she wouldn't be in either," snapped Hyslop irritably. "She got a telegram and went out hurriedly. I don't like it."

"Which way did she go?"

The young man's face brightened. "Oh, that's the most hopeful part of it. The butler saw her speak to Chalmers, and he went and fetched her a taxi and then followed himself."

"Then that's all right! Stop worrying and come and finish your meal."

Hyslop sat down. "I'm going to ring up again at eight. He said she was sure to be back for dinner by then."

"For all you know we may have to go off to Sussex before that. Viv's been down there for two hours at least and should be calling up any time."

"If that girl's lost . . ." He caught Jimmie's eye and dropped cheerfully into his old manner. "Sorry, old horse! . . . I know what's wrong with me. I want more beer and there's darn little left. . . . Damn Fred for taking beer shampoos at his time of life."

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## XX

### VIV TELEPHONES

AT five minutes to eight and just when Hyslop was about to call up Naylor's house again, the phone rang and Jimmie, told to hold on for a trunk call, at last heard Viv's voice on the wire.

"I say," she began, "I've got a startling bit of news. Don't say I never find out things, Jimmie."

"I suppose," said Jimmie, with a grin, "you've just discovered that Ballarat is one of the gang."

"Oh, Jimmie!" cried the girl, in disappointed tones. "You are a pig! How did *you* find out? I have to come right down to this desolate spot—and it is desolate too—in order to discover that fact and you apparently find it out without moving out of the flat."

Her grievance was so genuine that Jimmie soothed her. "It's your honor really, Viv, because I got it from the car you chased—OR1427. It's Ballarat's car."

"I know. I've just seen it. But I recognized the man himself."

"What do you mean?" Jimmie's voice was suddenly sharply inquisitive. "*Recognized* Ballarat?"

"Before I found out he *was* Ballarat, of course. I had to ask villagers."

"But you don't know him by sight."

"Of course, I do. Why, I thought you said you *knew* all this. But you don't after all! I recognized him as the man I followed over a week ago—the man who got out of that car and went to the Granada for lunch."

"Not Vallance?" cried Rezaire incredulously. "Well, I'm damned!"

A merry laugh reached his ears. "Oh, Jimmie! Then I really *am* telling you something after all. Yes, when Sir Victor Ballarat makes his occasional visits to London—probably every time there's a job on hand—he simply arrives at his Bayswater Hotel as Mr. Vallance up from the country."

"That's it. Well done, Viv! That is a good bit of work. Anything else to report?"

"I'm going back to watch The Grange for a bit and see if I can pick up anything. It's a queer house all by itself about two miles from Watermere village, and the village itself is only ten houses, a church and an inn. I say, I nearly got caught by Vallance—Ballarat, whatever his name is, when I *did* see him—about twenty minutes ago. I wasn't expecting him, and his Manchester came along at a fearful rate and forced me into a ditch. There was a chauffeur driving and inside I saw our friend and with him the female of the gang. The blonde in the green hat."

"What were they doing?"

"Quarrelling, I should say, from the look of Ballarat's face. The car was moving too, I can tell you, and I only just got the number. Well, I'll ring off now. . . . Anything else?"

"Yes," said Jimmie abruptly. "I've just decided to come down there myself to-night."

"Good! Inquire for me as Mrs. Ratchett at 'The Swan Inn,' Watermere, and I'll arrange to leave any message there for you."

"Right ho! And by the way," he called, "if I find there's a Mr. Ratchett when I get to the 'Swan,' I'll break both your necks!"

Viv's tinkling laugh answered him again as he replaced the receiver and turned at once to Hyslop to tell him the latest news about Sir Victor Ballarat.

"And now," he said, as he finished, "off we go to Sussex."

"One minute, old son," said Hyslop, who had been impatiently fingering the telephone. "Just going to ring up Betty . . ."

"She'll be there by now," said Jimmie reassuringly, and went out of the room to order his Wentley car to be brought round from the garage at once. Both the Wentley tourer and the small Morris were kept in a converted stable at the back of Somerset Mansions, and Jimmie had some while ago hired a room over the top of this garage for the chauffeur—one Alfred Betters, the same man who had played the part of the tramp to his master's Old Woman on that memorable day in the Park. Betters would be a valuable addition to their forces in the case of any trouble at The Grange with Sir Victor Ballarat.

As he went into the hall, however, Joe Plumer was just opening the front door in answer to a knock. Outside stood a massive constable in uniform.

. . . . .

Hyslop's heart fell as he heard the butler's voice in the receiver.

"No, sir, I'm sorry, Miss Naylor's not in yet."

"Not yet?"

"No, sir. Will you speak to Mr. Naylor? I think he was trying to get you just now to ask you about her."

"Ask me?" Hyslop's face was white as he shouted to Jimmie, "Betty's not back yet."

Then Naylor's voice sounded harsh and anxious in the receiver.

"Look here! Where's Betty? Hasn't she left you yet? She was to have been back for dinner."

"Left me? She hasn't been here."

"But she went out to see you—or Rezaire—after getting your telegram."

"I sent no telegram."

"You must have done. I found it here in a waste-paper basket."

He read it out over the wire.

"Good God!" cried the young man. "Here, Jimmie! Jimmie! Where are you?" he called; for Jimmie was in conversation with someone in the hall. "Jimmie! Here!"

"Do you mean to say," Naylor was crying, "that you didn't send it? That she's missing?"

"Wait a minute. I'm just trying to get Jimmie," replied Hyslop. "It may be quite all right," he added, as soothingly as possible. "Our watcher is with her wherever she is. . . ."

"No, he isn't, I'm afraid," cut in Jimmie's voice, cold and collected at his ear. Behind him loomed up a policeman.

Naylor was talking again and Hyslop interrupted.

"One minute, Mr. Naylor. Hold the line, will you? Rezaire's got some news!" He clapped a hand on the mouthpiece. "What in Heaven's name is up, Jimmie?"

"This constable's just come round to tell us that Chalmers has been hurt and is in hospital asking for me. Annoying, isn't it?" he said, assuming a light manner and frowning slightly at the young man.

Hyslop pulled himself together. The policeman must not be allowed to glimpse the big issues behind the case.

"Run over?" he queried curtly.

"No, sir. He's been set upon, looks like it. Hit from behind. No chance of getting the blokes that did it. He never knew nothing."

"He's not in danger, is he?" asked Jimmie. "Because I'm afraid I can't possibly go to him now."

"He's in no danger, sir. Be all right in a day or two. In fact I wouldn't have come round, except that you're evidently his employer and he seemed to want to tell you that he wasn't doing his job. So worried about it, he was, that the doctor said he'd have you told."

"Oh, I understand. I'll come round to-morrow and see him. I wish I could come to-night. Well, thank you, constable. Will you let him know that I am taking steps to—to have his work done?"

The policeman, a little mystified by the whole business, promised he would do this, accepted a tip and departed.

Jimmie turned to the phone and took the receiver from Hyslop.

"This is Rezaire, Mr. Naylor. I don't want to worry you, but it looks very much as though what we feared has come about. They saw that their plan to make you fire me this afternoon had slipped up and so they went out to get your daughter, and did it by a trick this afternoon."

"Good Heavens, man! I'll go to the police at once."

"I'm afraid that won't help much. But I'm going to do what I can at once myself. How was she dressed when she went out?"

Naylor described Betty's clothes, with the butler's help, and Jimmie gave a little whistle. "That makes me feel hopeful."

"Do you know where she is?"

"I have an idea and I'm going out right now. Will you ring me up to-morrow morning? Keep your heart up! They won't hurt her, I'm certain."

"Where are we going, laddie?" asked Hyslop excitedly. "How the hell did they get her? Followed her and Chalmers, I suppose, and set on them both . . ."

"That wasn't Chalmers," returned Jimmie, hurriedly



getting into a cap and light coat and slipping his gun into the pocket. "Chalmers was knocked out from the policeman's account at five o'clock, and she didn't leave the house till half-past. No, a man made up like Chalmers had taken his place soon after five and was ready waiting till she asked him for a taxi."

"Which they had told her to do in the fake wire! My God, they're clever swine. Here, where are we going?"

"Watermere. As I told Viv."

"But dammit, we must find Betty first. We can't go coolly away and . . ."

"H. H.," said Jimmie, smiling for the first time, "you're too excited to use your brain. Remember Viv said she saw Ballarat and the girl in the green hat?"

"Yes."

"At half-past seven in Sussex. But that girl was up here jabbing at you with hatpins at six-forty-five. Can't have been done in the time."

"You mean?"

"I mean Viv was mistaken. There's more than one green hat in the world and Betty, I've just been told, was wearing a green hat when she went out. The car was going fast and Viv jumped to a wrong conclusion. And all what more likely than that they've rushed her down to Ballarat's place, which they think is quite unknown to us."

Hyslop's spirits revived with a bound.

"To horse, old horse!" he cried, and made for the door.