
XXV

ON THE WAY HOME

THE newcomer applied brakes and pulled up smartly at sight of the ditched car. Jimmie stepped forward, prepared to refuse the forthcoming offer of help—for only a wheel needed to be changed—when to his surprise he was greeted by Viv's voice, breathless and shaken.

"Oh, Jimmie, are you all right?"

"Good Lord, Viv! You! I'd forgotten all about you."

"Are you quite safe?"

"Trust me. And what's more, Betty's safe too!"

"Oh, how splendid!" She jumped out of the Morris and ran over to them. "I got your message at the inn and went over to The Grange to see if I could help. And just as I arrived there I heard a shot. So I hid the car and came up quietly on foot to see what it was."

"Atta baby!" praised Hyslop. "Good girl!"

"I heard them getting into their car to go after you. And they meant business, Jimmie; they said they were going to stop your mouths to-night, one way or the other, because you know too much. Jimmie boy, I was scared stiff!"

"Did you see the Black King there?" asked Betty. "We didn't."

"I didn't see anyone really. It was pitch black and they were all piling in so quickly. I couldn't do anything else but follow them as hard as I could, to see if I could help."

"And so you have. They didn't know who it was, and you scared them off."

"Makes me laugh," said Hyslop. "There they were tackling all the men of our gang quite happily, when up comes our one lone female and they streak for the big spaces."

"If they'd only known how scared I was!"

"I suppose, old thing, you heard a shot. . . ."

"Yes, sir," cut in Jimmie, answering Hyslop in a brisk and polite fashion. "It sounded just like a shot, didn't it? But it was really our back tire bursting."

Hyslop was too clever to express any surprise at the other's abruptly changed manner, and moreover had the presence of mind to nudge Betty who was about to speak. Jimmie, the young man knew well, had a reason for everything. And almost immediately he understood the reason, when Rezaire continued to someone who had come up silently on a bicycle as they spoke:

"Good-evening, constable. No one hurt, I'm glad to say. Tire blew out and nearly ditched us, but we'll soon have the spare on."

"I 'eard it go too," said the country policeman. "Just like a shot, as you said."

"Exactly like . . ." Not a muscle of Jimmie's face moved. Then he turned to Hyslop and raised his hat. "Thank you very much for your offer of help, but we're quite all right."

Hyslop, catching on, said good-bye and got into the Morris as if it were his car. Then with consummate strategy, before Viv could make a move to get in beside him, he lifted his hat to her in farewell, turned to Betty with a "Come on, Clara! They evidently don't need our help!" and patted the seat next him.

Betty, slightly bewildered but not at all reluctant, got in at his side. As they drove off triumphantly, he

heard Viv murmur to Jimmie in a most unladylike fashion, "Well, I'm damned! . . ."

.

"You have got a nerve—taking her car like that," remarked Betty, after they had gone half a mile.

"Rot! She won't mind going back with Jimmie. Even though he is her husband."

"I say, it was terribly thrilling all that, wasn't it? I've never been so excited in my life. I'm not sure I wasn't a little frightened too."

"You know, old thing," said Hyslop severely, "you won't be satisfied till you've had a real he-bullet through your permanent wave."

Betty laughed. Then: "Oh, how's your finger? I'd quite forgotten to ask."

"Sore but still there!"

"You must let me do it up properly?" suggested Betty.

"All right," agreed the young man, rather to his own surprise. "We'll draw up in a minute and you can do your worst."

In a few minutes he had backed the little car aside just off the road near the Wisley pine-woods, and Betty had examined and retied the finger. It was much the same as before, but that didn't matter; she felt now that she had done it for him; and he was inclined to believe it was infinitely better than anyone could ever have done it.

He made a move to switch on the engine again, but Betty's fingers suddenly closed over his and prevented him.

"Don't let's go on yet," she said. "It's so lovely and quiet here in the wood, after all our motoring and shooting."

"Sounds like an estate in Scotland," suggested Hyslop.

"Yes, doesn't it?" she agreed, with a nervous laugh.

Hyslop did not speak further, and she suddenly wondered if she had been too obvious in stopping him from switching on.

"We'll go on if you like," she said suddenly. "Only I . . ."

"No, we'll stay. It's nice here. Besides, I'm thinking. Good for the brain!"

"What are you thinking about?" Betty's voice was eager and interested and Hyslop thought how vital she was. She had been vital and warm too in his arms in the bottom of the Wentley. And, he suddenly recollected with a thrill, she had not been in a faint, yet she had lain there quite happily. Good God! She must have *liked* it. His thoughts broke into speech.

"*Did* you like it?" he said, wondering if she would know what he meant.

Apparently she did. As a matter of fact she had also been recalling that moment with a queer little sense of warm delight.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Yes, what?" Hyslop was not yet sure if she had guessed his thoughts.

"Yes, darling," replied Betty surprisingly, in a meek voice, quite misunderstanding him.

Next minute she found herself being kissed. . . .

"This was what I meant," said Hyslop, some while later, holding her very close.

"I know." She dimpled into laughter. "And I *did* like it. I very nearly said 'Do it again'—only I thought it would be forward."

"Whatever you said, the result's darn good. Would it be in order if I kissed you once more?"

"Try and see! When I know what sort of a kiss it is, I'll . . . ooh, let me get my breath! Darling, you *are* impetuous!"

"I'm so infernally glad you're safe. When I think that those brutes had the nerve to shut you up . . ."

"It was nice of them. Otherwise you couldn't have rescued me."

"Seriously though, they're dangerous."

Betty ignored this. "And what's the use of being in love with a man who doesn't go on rescuing one?"

"Do you love me, Betty darling?"

"Don't you know it?"

"I love you."

She snuggled closer to him, very soft and feminine. "It's something to hear that. I often wondered if you'd ever say it."

"I say, shall we try a kiss? Just to see what they're like. I've often heard talk of them."

"You dear fool . . ."

"Seriously, Betty," repeated Hyslop, returning to earth a little later, "we shall have to be awfully careful of you. You're valuable both to me and to the Black King."

"But he could never get hold of me again. I mean, I know too much now to be caught."

Hyslop laughed. "For two years he's been too clever for the whole of Scotland Yard—and you're only nineteen. Besides, he's utterly unscrupulous."

"I know. I can see that after to-night. But surely in the heart of London and having had this experience, nothing could happen to me again."

"Nothing will, if there's anything I can do. You're much too perfect to lose," said Hyslop rapturously, and folded her in his arms once more. . . .

A car came racing up and its big headlights played for

a moment on the two young people in their close embrace. Then the lights dipped ceremoniously and it swept past with three reverent toots of the horn.

“Someone’s funny,” said Betty.

“Someone! That’s Jimmie,” said Hyslop. “And now we shall never hear the last of this. . . .”

HYSLOP shone his torch gingerly round the garage and finally flashed it on the number plate of the red car standing therein. Then he switched off and shook his head in a puzzled fashion. Finally he tiptoed out of the building as silently as he had entered, crossed a yard, climbed a fence with infinite precaution, and choosing his moment dropped over unobserved into the quiet street.

It was about nine P. M. and Hyslop was on a job which Jimmie had given him. Earlier that evening had come in a note from Gullidge, a reply to an urgent query of Jimmie's made as soon as possible after their return from that dramatic Sussex adventure.

Gullidge's answer ran: "*LX2212 (dark red Sheffield saloon) belongs according to official registration to Mr. P. de L. Stevens of 113, Myrtle Bush Avenue, London, N.*" But Hyslop, walking down a dreary street in North London, shook his head. He had just paid a private visit to Mr. P. de L. Stevens' garage, and though there was certainly a red Sheffield therein, its number was not LX2212, but AA876.

There was something very funny going on, thought Hyslop. Mr. Stevens, whom he had ascertained earlier from a maid next door was something in a City bank, was to all intents a respectable citizen. Yet he had in his garage a car which did not bear the number his car should; and the number plates were not faked, nor were there spare ones in the garage, for Hyslop had

looked very carefully. If this was not Mr. Stevens' car, whose was it? Who was the officially registered owner of AA876? And how was it that this Stevens, whoever he was, was instead the officially registered owner of the real number of the mysterious Black King's car? Could he possibly be the Black King? There was more in this excursion than Hyslop could tackle.

He found a call-box and in a few minutes was speaking to Rezaire.

"I don't know what's happening to the country, old lad," said Hyslop plaintively. "Every alternate car has a wrong number, and the ones in between have wrong owners. Someone's sleeping at the post of duty."

"I tell you the Black King's organization is pretty wide. You can't round up every clue in a day. But we're getting warmer."

"Yes, but where do we go from here? Gullidge again to discover the owner of AA876?"

"I suppose so. I'll see if I can get him now. If not, the very first thing in the morning."

"You know, he'll begin to think we're running a business in stolen secondhand cars!"

"Never mind. We must follow this up. If we come up against a brick wall over the number, I think I shall tackle this man Stevens direct. Anyway, come back here now, H. H., and we'll talk over plans together. . . ."

Gullidge, luckily, caught early next morning was for once in great spirits and as usual on those occasions began to pull Jimmie's leg.

"I thought you'd be asking about that 'AA' number," he began.

Jimmie was surprised. "How the devil did you guess that?"

"Ah," retorted Gullidge airily, "we policemen have as good brains as some imitation busies I know."

"I see you made an arrest for that Regent Street job," remarked Jimmie sweetly.

"We did."

"Was that all real police brains, or did you get any help from any imitation busy?"

Gullidge, remembering Jimmie's hint about the man Streaky White which had proved most useful, could not think up an adequate reply before Rezaire had continued: "Well, tell me, Inspector, how did you know I was going to ask about this fresh number? I didn't know it myself till . . ."

"Till you'd investigated the other a bit, eh? Well, to tell you the truth, Rezaire, when I made the first inquiry for you I found that that man Stevens owns two cars, red Sheffields both. One is LX22 . . . whatever the figure was—and the other is this 'AA' number you've just asked about."

"Oh," said Jimmie, and was silent. "Well, thanks very much," he added, and rang off. Then he swore softly to himself. He had, as he had mentioned the night before to Hyslop, come up against a brick wall. The question of the Black King's car was more and more puzzling. Why did Stevens own two cars, one of them the Black King's? And where was the latter kept? There was now, he could see, only one thing to do and that was get hold of Mr. P. de L. Stevens direct and see if he could startle any explanation out of him by fair means or foul. He had an idea he would not find too clear a conscience in that North London house.

He glanced at his watch. It was barely eight o'clock. He could just catch the man before he went off to his business. It was lucky Gullidge had happened to be at the Yard so early.

In a few minutes he was speeding in a taxi up to North London.

.

Mr. Stevens, at breakfast with his wife and family, was told that a gentleman wished to see him. "A little gentleman, sir, with a bowler hat and a note-book."

"Oh. I'll be out at once," replied Mr. Stevens hurriedly, but took a moment to compose himself. Once before he had had a visit from a man with a bowler hat and note-book and it had been a near thing. Had it not been for a certain friend, he might . . . However, what had he to fear now?

"Good-morning," he said courteously, a typical little suburban City-going gentleman, with the large moustache beloved by caricaturists. "What can I do for you?"

"Small matter, sir," replied the man with the bowler hat. His sharp eyes fixed the other as he said abruptly: "I'm a detective from Scotland Yard."

Mr. Stevens started momentarily, and noting this Jimmie Rezaire smiled to himself. The rôle of an official detective was one of his most favored disguises. Not only did it explain his asking questions, but also he was very frequently able to deduce from the manner in which he was received that questions were not wanted. There was now no doubt in his mind that, as he had already guessed, Mr. Stevens' conscience was not absolutely clear.

"Of course, sir," he continued pleasantly, following the other into the front room, "I haven't come to arrest you, I hope. No, sir. Ha! Ha! But just a few questions." The other's slight hesitation at the word "arrest" confirmed him in his suspicions. Certainly there was something here to be found out.

"Well—what are your questions?" asked the other coolly, though his twitching fingers betrayed his emotion.

"You have a car, sir?" began Jimmie.

"I—I have."

"Just the one car?"

"That's right," Mr. Stevens looked suddenly relieved. He knew well, had indeed been carefully told, how to deal with a situation like this. "It's out in my garage now," he went on. "A red Sheffield."

Jimmie could have laughed with triumph. He had his man now just where he wanted him.

"Last night, sir," he continued, "an old woman was knocked down in Camden Town and seriously hurt by a car which didn't stop. The number was taken and it was your car."

"I know nothing of this." Mr. Stevens was genuinely puzzled.

"Of course not, sir. Otherwise we *might* have to arrest you. But it's been clearly established by witnesses that it was the old lady's fault. She came out from behind a tram right into your car, so to speak, and the back mudguard caught her. The driver could not have seen the accident and no one shouted at him till too late. But you understand you'll be wanted as a witness at the inquest. You don't remember the incident—or accident as one might say. Ha! Ha!"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

Jimmie thought to himself, "I bet you don't." Out loud he said, "Perhaps I could have a look at the mudguard of the car if it's handy, just to help the evidence?"

"By all means," said Mr. Stevens, moving to the door. "But I don't think you'll find any mark. I suppose you're quite certain it was my car?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Jimmie affected to consult his notebook; and suddenly played his trump. "LX2212."

Mr. Stevens stopped abruptly. "What?" he cried.

"That's right, isn't it? We traced you from the registration."

"Yes, that's right. From the registration," agreed Stevens, but did not now make any attempt to lead the way out to the garage. He was thinking very hard. What was he to do? After what he had admitted about possessing only one car, he could not possibly let the detective go out and see AA876. What a fool he had been not to have asked the number sooner, not to have realized before he had committed himself that the car concerned in the accident might have been LX2212! Anyway, what the hell had Dakers been doing running over old women and letting him in without warning for a mess like this?

The detective was already making a respectful motion towards the door. "I expect, sir," he said soothingly, "the marks on the car will prove that you couldn't have helped it."

Mr. Stevens pulled himself sharply together. "I—look here, Inspector."

"Sergeant, sir, thank you," said Jimmie modestly. He prided himself on playing any part to the utmost.

"Look here, sergeant. As a matter of fact I misunderstood one of your first questions. Actually I have two cars. . . ."

"Two cars? You told me just now you only had one."

"I was naturally a little flustered at your news. I only have one that I use myself." Mr. Stevens had now made up his mind. Dakers had done this; Dakers could do the explaining. He would be angry, of course, and it might even mean exposure, but damn it that was

almost preferable to this life of deceit and panic. And anyway Dakers would have more cause to be angry with him, if he let this detective get suspicious and start asking questions; when Dakers could deal with him so much more skilfully. He assumed a deprecatory manner:

"I—er—hire my other out, to help out my income, if you must know."

"Quite, sir. I understand," murmured Jimmie. "Perhaps you'll let me have the gentleman's name and address?" he asked, arriving at last at the point in the interview to which he had been steadily working.

With a little sigh of relief and apprehension Mr. Stevens hurriedly scribbled something on a piece of paper. "Here it is. That's the address where you'll find him during the day. He rents an office there and runs a small business as a book-maker."

"Thank you, sir." Jimmie shut his note-book with a snap that was almost triumphant. He had got what he wanted. "Then I'll let you know if anything further turns up."

Mr. Stevens nervously watched him down the garden path. Then he flew to the phone, gave a number, and after a while began to speak in a frightened, apologetic voice.

"Poor fish!" thought Jimmie, on his way home. "He was dead easy. I suppose they've got some small hold on him and he has to toe the line by letting them register their car in his name."

He smiled happily and looked again at the paper he had been given. It read: "*Mr. Samuel Dakers. Commission Agent, 215, Piccadilly, W.1.*"

At last he had something definite to go upon, the name of an accomplice whose probable existence he had already hinted to Gullidge a few days ago. For No. 215 Piccadilly was the Granada Restaurant.

XXVII

BETTY'S PART

AS a result of the information so skilfully extracted from the outwitted Mr. Stevens, Jimmie had decided that the Granada must be his next point of attack, and with this in mind he arranged to lunch there with Hyslop the very next day with the object of making a reconnaissance in force, if opportunity offered. In the meantime he had another important move to make as soon as possible in his battle against the Black King, and twelve o'clock found him deep in consultation with Naylor in the financier's library. Hyslop and Betty were also there, and the latter was the subject of discussion.

"We cannot afford to run that risk again," Jimmie was saying very definitely, "if we expect success."

For Betty, fresh from a full day's rest, had just finished telling them in full detail the story of her abduction. Not that there was anything in it to help him; the whole thing had been a simple yet perfect piece of organization, and the impersonation of Chalmers had been the smartest touch of all.

Jimmie had been to see his damaged retainer in hospital already that morning, but could learn nothing there. Chalmers, it transpired, had just stepped round the corner for some cigarettes when he was hit on the head with some kind of black-jack from behind and did not recover consciousness till he found himself in the hospital, where the police had taken him. The whole thing had been delightfully simple and only a combina-

tion of brilliant deduction and lucky circumstances, which were unlikely to repeat themselves, had given Betty back to them again while still leaving their hands free.

"Yes," repeated Jimmie, "we mustn't run that risk again."

"What's to be done?" asked Naylor.

"Give me a guard with orders never to leave me for a minute," suggested Betty.

"Put you away in a nunnery more like," smiled Rezaire.

"Oh, have a heart, major-general!" said Hyslop, who was sitting suspiciously close to her at the big table.

"No." Rezaire addressed Naylor. "The only thing is to send Betty away, till we've finished. Somewhere where they'll never find her."

"Yes, that is best," agreed Naylor suddenly, and Jimmie alone noticed that his glance had been on Hyslop as he spoke.

"Here, I say!" put in Betty, and H. H. added, "Far too drastic!"

But Jimmie, aided by Naylor, had his way and before the meeting broke up it had all been arranged. Naylor, by now rather nervous about his daughter, had wanted her to stay with an aunt in Hertfordshire, but Jimmie had pointed out that to go to relatives or friends might make it easy for their opponents to trace her; and so it was at last decided that she was to go to a little village inn at Ipfield in Surrey whose proprietor Jimmie knew.

Betty, mutinous at first—for the memory of Hyslop's kisses was fresh in her heart—had at last been made to realize that if the Black King got hold of her again it would definitely spell failure. Moreover, Jimmie had

tactfully agreed that Hyslop should escort her away and be responsible for throwing any followers off the scent.

"For," he said, "my feeling is that they'll continue to watch you and will have another shot at getting you pretty soon."

"I don't want to be out of it all like this," objected the girl. "I want to help."

"Your job, the most important of any now, is simply not to let yourself be kidnapped again."

"Well, you've got it all mapped out for me, haven't you?" she said resignedly. "When am I to go?"

"This afternoon, please," returned Jimmie politely.

"This afternoon!"

"Yes. So you'd better think about packing."

"Are you sending me by passenger train or freight?" asked Betty, with sarcasm.

This let Hyslop in.

"By freight, old dear! Marked 'fragile' on one side and 'Not to be Taken Away' on the other. . . ."

.

Hyslop, who had had the certain impression that the Black King's men were once again unobtrusively on watch outside Naylor's house, set about getting Betty secretly away to Ipfield with great thoroughness. Marylebone Station in North West London is perhaps hardly the best point of departure for Surrey, but at two-thirty he and Betty arrived there in a taxi with two small suitcases. Hyslop looked cautiously round and then ran into the booking-hall, the girl at his heels. Both had the air of people who fear that perhaps they are being followed, but are fairly certain they are not. The young man asked for two first class tickets to Nottingham in a low voice and appeared greatly chagrined when the clerk failed to hear and made him repeat.

Then they took seats in an empty compartment of the corridor train, and Hyslop set himself to observe travellers on the platform very carefully. He particularly avoided, however, too keen a scrutiny of a black-bearded clergyman who, after some well-acted hesitation between two compartments, chose that next to theirs.

"That's the fellow, I think," murmured Hyslop. "He was near me at the booking-office."

"I never saw him watching the house."

"No, they're doing the job really well this time. But we'll fool them. Now remember what I said, don't show in any way that we suspect him, or my dodge won't succeed! Carry on just as usual. . . . Er—like this." And with a swift glance out of the window to see that they were unobserved, Hyslop leaned across and kissed her.

"Oh, darling, someone might see!"

"No, no one's looking. I made certain."

"Well—do it again! . . ."

"Do you know, dearest one," she continued, with a happy little laugh, "I was beginning to think that the night before last was all a dream. You gave no sign, till just now. . . ."

"Sign of what?"

"Sign that you had really kissed me, and that I hadn't dreamed it."

"I didn't have a chance to give signs, darling, with your father around. . . . Hullo, we're off, and the first stop is not for nearly an hour and a half. Plenty of time to make up!"

"Make up what?"

"Make up for lost signs, my angel," said Hyslop, slipping an arm round her. . . .

.

"Interval for business now," said Hyslop briskly, as they slowed down for Rugby. "You know what you've got to do, sweetheart."

"Yes. Let's hope it works all right."

"Bound to. Bet old Blackbird next door will never . . . Shh!" he hissed.

For at that moment the clergyman passed slowly down the corridor and back again a moment later.

"Wanted to make certain we were showing no signs of getting out," whispered H. H. "We must think we're an unsuspecting pair."

The train drew in to the platform and after a few minutes' halt Hyslop's head projected from his window in order to ask a porter how much longer the train waited.

On learning that they had three minutes yet, he jumped out. Followed by Betty's purposely shrill injunction to be sure and get "*Piccadilly*" and the "*Bystander*" and not to miss the train, he made for the bookstall.

Throughout this the black-bearded clergyman was at his window benevolently surveying the platform and incidentally prepared to jump out at a moment's notice if that course should be adopted by the girl in the next compartment, the sleeve of whose green mackintosh he could still just conveniently see. But this he did not anticipate; he was certain that they did not suspect; moreover, the young man had got out without his hat or either of the suitcases. Besides, his orders had been to follow the girl, not her escort.

The minutes went past. The young man did not reappear. The black-bearded man grew anxious, glanced from the platform to the girl's green sleeve and back again. His hand was ready on the door-handle, for he believed she was going to make a dash for it.

A whistle shrilled, the train jerked to life. The clergyman with a sudden misgiving lest there should have been a trick in all this, was about to leap out when he saw Hyslop's yellow head as he ran frantically for the train—arms full of papers.

He panted nearer, but the train had gathered speed. Porters shouted. He gave up, calling vaguely to his companion something about waiting for him at Nottingham.

The clergyman could not resist grinning at him in triumph. Of all stupid things to do, the fool had missed the train. Little did he guess that the girl was now alone in the same coach as the man detailed to follow her and find out where she went. . . .

Then his grin faded abruptly. It was such a stupid thing to do that it was improbable he had really done it. He jumped up with an oath. He had just realized that the advantages of a corridor-train were not all on one side, that one might walk along and leave the train anywhere one pleased. . . .

In the next compartment he found two suitcases, empty, a walking-stick, and a green mackintosh, the left sleeve skilfully propped on the window-ledge and stuffed with a newspaper. And the next stop was Nottingham, over an hour away. He returned to his seat with a thoughtful smile, and finally with the air of one who is at least finding one advantage in an unfortunate situation, removed his hot and uncomfortable beard.

Back on Rugby platform Hyslop, wearing a hat somewhat creased from being folded into his pocket, was greeting Betty near where she had descended at the far end of the Nottingham train.

"That settles the Reverend Whiskers, old darling. And now for the next train to town, Ipfield, and supper!"

Betty had been safely installed in the Anchor Inn at Ipfield, whither Hyslop had brought her in a hired car from the main line station five miles away. They had had an early supper together in a tiny coffee room overlooking a garden gay with michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums, and the time had now come for Hyslop to get back to London. Betty walked with him along the quiet lanes to the branch line station and clung to his arm.

"You're sure you won't be frightened, my darling?" asked Hyslop, for about the sixth time. "I know that nobody has the vaguest idea you're here, but still you are all on your own."

"Of course I shan't be frightened."

"You must wire Jimmie at once if anything looks funny, don't you know. And for Heaven's sake, Betty, don't let them get you again, if you love us all."

"I do love you—all," she smiled. "So I won't."

"Good! Kiss me."

"But," resumed Betty, a little later, "what I *am* worried about is you."

"Me? Good Lord!"

"Anything might happen to you. You might get hurt by that man Fred—he's had one try already—and I should be away down here."

"Safest place for you."

"No, seriously, H. H.—*dear* H. H.—you *must* make Jimmie promise to let me know at once supposing—supposing anything *does* happen to you."

"Very well."

"And then I'll come up at once."

"Here, you can't do that!"

"You won't be able to stop me."

"No. You might spoil something. Promise me you won't come without asking Jimmie's permission?"

"Very well, I promise. But," she added, in true feminine fashion, "if he doesn't give it, I shall come just the same. Because I love you."

She slipped her arms round his neck and kissed him again fervently, passionately; and his ardor answered hers.

"I—I shall miss the train, dearest," said H. H. at last.

Betty's eyes shone back into his. "What would you do if you did?" she whispered.

"There isn't another to-night, you know," replied the young man gravely.

"Well, what would you do if you did?" Her eyes now no longer looked at him but were veiled by her long lashes.

"I—I simply mustn't miss it," said H. H. abruptly. "Come along." He moved on purposefully and the girl's restraining fingers slid from him.

They walked in silence for a little. When the station was only a hundred yards away, Betty said:

"H. H., do you really love me?"

"Yes," he said at once—and wondered.

"Well . . ."

"Well what?"

"I don't know. . . . Darling, in a little while last trains won't matter."

"Why?" He was preoccupied with his thoughts.

"Why? Because you won't have to go away—as you have to now. You'll be able to stay—with me. We'll be married."

Hyslop flung an arm round her and held her close to him, but his face was grave and set.

"Here's the train!" he said abruptly. "I must run. . . ."

Their lips met wildly for one ardent second, and then

he was running hard for the station. He knew he dare not risk missing that last train.

.

Hyslop was very thoughtful as he settled himself in his compartment. He was pondering on Betty's last words "we'll be married." It was funny, but he had not thought of marriage before. He could hardly visualize it now. Marriage with Betty would mean giving up the life of excitement and adventure he was now leading. Yes, he would have to settle down to humdrum happiness. Worse, he would have to give up his partnership with Jimmie and Viv and stolid, loyal Joe Plumer; they would not be respectable enough for Naylor's son-in-law.

It was not only his friends who were disreputable, he mused further. He himself had been a criminal, had escaped the penalty and, honest now, had no intention of paying it. That would not appeal to a man in Naylor's circumstances. Naylor had given years of his life to paying back as his conscience dictated. And Betty had the same quixotic strain in her.

He sighed. It was a problem indeed. But one line of action at least was clear to him. He must write to Naylor next morning, before he went out to the Granada with Jimmie and must tell him the history of his past years. That was only fair. And when he saw Betty again, he must tell her too. The rest was on the knees of the gods.

XXVIII

AT THE GRANADA

LUNCH time next day found Jimmie and Hyslop as arranged at a table in the ground floor grill-room of the Granada. The Granada was now looming very large in Jimmie's plans. He had suspected an accomplice there some while before, but had not followed up his suspicions at once, because he had believed it was only an underling, such as a waiter or hall-porter. But he remembered now that there were offices to let somewhere upstairs in the building, and the mysterious "Commission Agent" who apparently borrowed Mr. Stevens' other car for nefarious purposes seemed a more hopeful line. He intended to discover all he could about this Mr. Samuel Dakers—from a distance first, if possible, in case the fellow happened to be one of the gang he already knew. And through him and his little nest in the Granada, he hoped at last he might get a good line on the elusive Black King. A cute dodge, he admitted, the way the existence of that car had been concealed. Bearing a fake number to start with for conducting the actual blackmailing business, it had underneath, for greater security still, the registered number of a small part accomplice, who, as a further blind, himself possessed quite openly a similar make of car with an innocent number.

Anyhow, cute though it was, he had been cuter. He had, as he prided himself on doing, found a weak spot and bluffed his way through it. But, he was realizing, he should have investigated this Granada line much

earlier—as soon, in fact, as he had deciphered the name in that precious little note-book he had so unfortunately lost. It promised to be far more important than he had realized. However, he was on to it now, and if he couldn't himself get hold of a man somewhere on the Restaurant premises who could give him useful information, well, his name was not Jimmie Rezaire. He might even get an early chance to investigate privately this mysterious bookmaker's office, while its owner was out.

.

By the end of the meal he had formulated a plan of action for the afternoon. He held a brief conversation with Hyslop as they went to get their coats and hats, as a result of which the young man went on out into the lounge while Jimmie stayed to chat with the cloakroom attendant.

"Haven't been here in a long while," he began, in the character of an expansive and well-lunched gentleman from the Colonies. "Gee, it's great to see old London and the Granada again." He gave the man a cigar from his overcoat pocket and sighed. "I was very well known here in my day. I remember Signor Domani perfectly, although he didn't remember me just now, and then I knew the gentleman in charge who lived upstairs—the proprietor would he be?"

"Captain Bailey, sir, do you mean? The gentleman with the artificial leg?" suggested the attendant.

"That's him," said Jimmie, waving his cigar vaguely in the air. "I remember I used to put a bit on a horse with him. Or am I thinking of someone else now?"

The man laughed. "That couldn't be Captain Bailey, sir. It might have been Mr. Dakers. He has his business office here, though he's nothing to do with the restaurant."

"Dakers!" exclaimed Jimmie. "I believe that's the fellow. What's he like?"

"Well, sir, he's very smart and he's small too. Shouldn't be surprised if he used to ride once himself."

Brief though the description was, it was enough for Jimmie to recognize with fair certainty the little "Raeburn" man, who had originally impersonated a jockey. "That's the fellow!" he cried. "I remember now." He gave the attendant five shillings and added genially: "I really must look him up again some time. Not to do business, but just in a friendly manner. Would he be up in his office now?"

"I believe he's generally out in the afternoon, sir. The mornings are best to catch him. But you could go up in the small lift and see. It's the second floor, sir, near Captain Bailey's suite."

"Thank you," said Jimmie, very gratefully, for he now had learned all he wanted to know. "I'll look in one morning," he added, as he moved to the swing door which led into the lounge.

He soon saw Hyslop sitting at a little table by himself, smoking meditatively, and went over to him.

"What luck, laddie?"

"Not bad!"

"Spill it!"

"I've discovered, firstly that Mr. Bookmaker Dakers is our little friend Raeburn, secondly that he has an office on the second floor, and thirdly that he's unlikely to be there now. So I'm going up to have a private fan round that room and see if I can discover anything."

"Well, be careful," warned Hyslop, "that you don't run into him. He's a nasty customer and after the other night we know they're not sticking at anything."

"Oh, I'll look after that," said Jimmie, getting up. "I've got a gun and a black-jack. I'm not going to run

risks at this stage. And I'm quite prepared not to get a chance at the room after all. On the other hand—here's luck to me! I've got the key, by the way!"

"What key?"

"The key we found in your Sir Ballance's pocket. We know he had come from here that night, so it's just possible it belongs to something in Dakers' room, for I think we can be certain now that Dakers is very highly placed in this blackmailing hierarchy."

"Half a minute," suddenly interrupted Hyslop. "See that bird?" He indicated a thickset man in a bowler hat who had just passed by them.

"What about him?"

"He's been up and down here two or three times and now he's looking as though he wanted to speak to us."

Jimmie swiftly surveyed the man, who had now sat down opposite, ostensibly to read a newspaper.

"The Granada's tame busy, I should say," he remarked at last. "He's got detective feet. Fat lot *he* knows about what happens here."

"Or anyone, for that matter," added Hyslop in low tones, as a well-dressed party sailed chattering past them from the Restaurant and out into Piccadilly. "But still, I can't help feeling he wants to chat with you."

"Wants to pull us for loitering," Jimmie suggested, and at that moment the man got up, refolded his newspaper and with a significant gesture, which Rezaire could not fail to interpret as a request to follow, went out into the street.

"Wait!" said Jimmie briefly to Hyslop, and went out too.

About twenty yards down Piccadilly the man in the bowler hat stopped till Jimmie caught up.

"You're Rezaire, aren't you?" he began.

"Wrong again, big boy. I'm Senator Borah!"

"Oh, to hell with that! You're all right with me."

"Suppose you tell me who you are first?" suggested Jimmie pleasantly, "instead of trying to tell me who I am."

"I'm a Yard man. Detective Constable Havers."

"Tell that to Auntie!" retorted Jimmie, who was nevertheless inclined to believe him from his appearance—for if ever a man looked like a detective it was this chap.

"I'm on the Black King case, same as you," continued the other. "Inspector Gullidge put me on to watch."

"Ah! Now you're talking sense," replied Jimmie, satisfied at mention of Gullidge and the Black King. "Well, what do you want with me? And anyway what is Gullidge doing in this? I wasn't aware the police had been called in."

"They haven't. And don't bite me. Gullidge is only helping you. We had a squeak up at the Yard yesterday."

"Why didn't Gullidge tell me that when I phoned him early this morning?" asked Jimmie sharply.

The other bridled at his implied suspicion. "I don't know it *was* yesterday. I only said so because I was put on the job this morning. Might have been earlier to-day of course. Anyway, my orders were to watch this place on the strength of the story we had. Gullidge is going to let you know what I find out. But seeing you here I thought I'd save time."

"Good man! What was the squeak?"

"That one of the Black King's lot hires a room somewhere in the Granada, the blind being that it's a Commission Agent's office."

"I know that," smiled Jimmie.

The man looked a little taken aback, but resumed with stolid detail:

"So I've been making inquiries on the Q. T. and this is what I've found out. The third and fourth floors are flats with a separate entrance. On the second are two suites for the *maître d'hôtel* and the Proprietor and a few extra rooms near the small lift. These are let out as offices. Well, there's a mysterious man who calls himself a Commission Agent . . ."

"Name of Dakers?" inquired Jimmie sweetly.

"Here, can't I tell you anything? I suppose you know which room it is?"

Jimmie was suddenly alert. "No, I don't know that."

"Turn to your right as you come out of the small lift and it's the first door on your left," said the detective triumphantly.

"Ah!" said Jimmie. Then: "Did you investigate it? Anything there?"

"Do you think the Yard can go clumping about privately owned rooms, till we get something to go on? No. This, I gather from Gullidge, is where you come in."

"Ah, I see. Well, thanks very much. I'll have a look at it myself. You can tell Gullidge you told me. And thank him for the kind thought."

"I'll come back with you, sir, and hang about in case you want me. I know a little place on the first floor where I can wait."

"That's fine," agreed Rezaire.

"Don't forget! The small lift!" repeated Havers.

They returned to the Granada. Jimmie rejoined Hyslop and within a few minutes had told him what he had learned from the Detective Constable. "And now," he concluded, "I know exactly where Dakers' room is and can go straight up. You wait down here. Havers has already gone to a place he knows on the first floor,

where I can get in touch with him too if I want. And, H. H.," he concluded seriously, "if I'm not back in half an hour and you haven't heard from me, start some searching inquiries pretty quick. Bye-bye." And he walked off round the corner and along the passage to the small lift which had the advantage of being an automatic one without an attendant.