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## Chapter 10 - Mr. Coulson Outmatched

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Mr. James B. Coulson settled down to live what was, to all appearance, a very inoffensive and ordinary life. He rose a little earlier than was customary for an Englishman of business of his own standing, but he made up for this by a somewhat prolonged visit to the barber, a breakfast which bespoke an unimpaired digestion, and a cigar of more than ordinary length over his newspaper. At about eleven o'clock he went down to the city, and returned sometimes to luncheon, sometimes at varying hours, never later, however, than four or five o'clock. From that time until seven, he was generally to be found in the American bar, meeting old friends or making new ones.

On the sixth day of his stay at the Savoy Hotel the waiter who looked after the bar smoking room accosted him as he entered at his usual time, a little after half past four.

"There's a gentleman here, Mr. Coulson, been asking after you," he announced. "I told him that you generally came in about this time. You'll find him sitting over there."

Mr. Coulson glanced in the direction indicated. It was Mr. Jacks who awaited him in the cushioned easy chair. For a single moment, perhaps, his lips tightened and the light of battle flashed in his face. Then he crossed the room apparently himself again,--an undistinguished, perfectly natural figure.

"It's Mr. Jacks, isn't it?" he asked, holding out his hand. "I thought I recognized you."

The Inspector rose to his feet.

"I am sorry to trouble you again, Mr. Coulson," he said, "but if you could spare me just a minute or two, I should be very much obliged."

Mr. Coulson laughed pleasantly.

"You can have all you want of me from now till midnight," he declared. "My business doesn't take very long, and I can only see the people I want to see in the middle of the day. After that, I don't mind telling you that I find time hangs a bit on my hands. Try one of these," he added, producing a cigar case.

The Inspector thanked him and helped himself. Mr. Coulson summoned the waiter.

"Highball for me," he directed. "What's yours, Mr. Jacks?"

"Thank you very much," the Inspector said. "I will take a little Scotch whiskey and soda."

The two men sat down. The corner was a retired one, and there was no one within earshot.

"Say, are you still on this Hamilton Fynes business?" Mr. Coulson asked.

"Partly," the Inspector replied.

"You know, I'm not making reflections," Mr. Coulson said, sticking his cigar in a corner of his mouth and leaning back in a comfortable attitude, "but it does seem to me that you are none too rapid on this side in clearing up these matters. Why, a little affair of that sort wouldn't take the police twenty minutes in New York. We have a big city, full of alien quarters, full of hiding places, and chock full of criminals, but our police catch em, all the same. There's no one going to commit murder in the streets of New York without finding himself in the Tombs before he's a week older. No offence, Mr. Jacks."

"I am not taking any, Mr. Coulson," the Inspector answered. "I must admit that there's a great deal of truth in what you say. It is rather a reflection upon us that we have not as yet even made an arrest, but I think you will also admit that the circumstances of those murders were exceedingly curious."

Mr. Coulson knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Well, as to that," he said, "and if we are to judge only by what we read in the papers, they are curious, without a doubt. But I am not supposing for one moment that you fellows at Scotland Yard don't know more than you've let on to the newspapers. You keep your discoveries out of the Press over here, and a good job, too, but you wouldn't persuade me that you haven't some very distinct theory as to how that crime was worked, and the sort of person who did it. Eh, Mr. Jacks?"

"We are perhaps not quite so ignorant as we seem," the Inspector answered, "and of course you are right when you say that we have a few more facts to go by than have appeared in the newspapers. Still, the affair is an extremely puzzling one,--as puzzling, in its way," Mr. Jacks continued, "as the murder on the very next evening of this young American gentleman."

Mr. Coulson nodded sympathetically. The drinks were brought, and he raised his glass to his guest.

"Here's luck!" he said--"luck to you with your game of human chess, and luck to me with my woollen machinery patents! You were speaking of that second murder," he remarked, setting down his glass. "I haven't noticed the papers much this morning. Has any arrest been made yet?"

"Not yet," the Inspector admitted. "To tell you the truth, we find it almost as puzzling an affair as the one in which Mr. Hamilton Fynes was concerned."

Mr. Coulson nodded. He seemed content, at this stage in their conversation, to assume the role of listener.

"You read the particulars of the murder of Mr. Vanderpole, I suppose?" the Inspector asked.

"Every word," Mr. Coulson answered. "Most interesting thing I've seen in an English newspaper since I landed. Didn't sound like London somehow. Gray old law-abiding place, my partner always calls it."

"I am going to be quite frank with you, Mr. Coulson," the Inspector continued. "I am going to tell you exactly why I have come to see you again tonight."

"Why, that's good," Mr. Coulson declared. "I like to know everything a man's got in his mind."

"I have come to you," the Inspector said, "because, by a somewhat curious coincidence, I find that, besides your slight acquaintance with and knowledge of Mr. Hamilton Fynes, you were also acquainted with this Mr. Richard Vanderpole,--that you were," he continued, knocking the ash off his cigar and speaking a little more slowly, "the last person, except the driver of the taxicab, to have seen him alive."

Mr. Coulson turned slowly around and faced his companion.

"Now, how the devil do you know that?" he asked.

The Inspector smiled tolerantly.

"Well," he said, "that is very simple. The taxicab started from here. Mr. Vanderpole had been visiting some one in the hotel. There was not the slightest difficulty in ascertaining that the person for whom he asked, and with whom he spent some twenty minutes in this very room, was Mr. James B. Coulson of New York."

"Seated on this very couch, sir!" Mr. Coulson declared, striking the arm of it with the flat of his hand,--"seated within a few feet of where you yourself are at this present moment."

The Inspector nodded.

"Naturally," he continued, "when I became aware of so singular an occurrence, I felt that I must lose no time in coming and having a few more words with you."

Mr. Coulson became meditative.

"Upon my word, when you come to think of it," he said, "it is a coincidence, sure! Two men murdered within twenty-four hours, and I seem to have been the last person who knew them, to speak to either. Tell you what, Mr. Jacks, if this goes on I shall get a bit scared. I think I shall let the London business alone and go on over to Paris."

The Inspector smiled.

"I fancy your nerves," he remarked, "are quite strong enough to bear the strain. However, I am sure you will not mind telling me exactly why Mr. Richard Vanderpole, Secretary to the American Embassy here, should have come to see you on Thursday night."

"Why, that's easy," Mr. Coulson replied. "You may have heard of my firm, The Coulson & Bruce Company of Jersey City. I'm at the head of a syndicate that's controlling some very valuable patents which we want to exploit on this side and in Paris. Now my people don't exactly know how we stand under this new patent bill of Mr. Lloyd George's. Accordingly they wrote across to Mr. Blaine-Harvey, putting the matter to him, and asking him to give me his opinion the moment I arrived on this side. You see, it was no use our entering into contracts if we had to build the plant and make the stuff over here. We didn't stand any earthly show of making it pay that way. Well, Mr. Harvey cabled out that I was just to let him know the moment I landed, and before I opened up any business. Sure enough, I called him up on the telephone, an hour or so after I got here, and this young man came round. I can tell you he was all right, too,--a fine, upstanding young fellow, and as bright as they make em. He brought a written opinion with him as to how the law would affect our proceedings. I've got it in my room if you'd care to see it?"

Mr. Jacks listened to his companion's words with unchanged face.

"If it isn't troubling you," he said, "it would be of some interest to me."

Mr. Coulson rose to his feet.

"You sit right here," he declared. "I'll be back in less than five minutes."

Mr. Coulson was as good as his word. In less than the time mentioned he was seated again by his companion's side with a square sheet of foolscap spread out upon the round table. The Inspector ran it through hurriedly. The paper was stamped American Embassy, and it was the digest of several opinions as to the effect of the new patent law upon the import of articles manufactured under processes controlled by the Coulson & Bruce syndicate. At the end there were a few lines in the Ambassador's own handwriting, summing up the situation. Mr. Coulson produced another packet of letters and documents.

"If you've an hour or so to spare, Mr. Jacks," he said, "I'd like to go right into this with you, if it would interest you any. It's my business over here, so naturally I am glad enough of an opportunity to talk it over."

Mr. Jacks passed back the paper promptly.

"I am extremely obliged to you," he said. "I am sure I should find it most interesting. Another time I should be very glad indeed to look through those specifications, but just now I have this affair of my own rather on my mind. About this Mr. Richard Vanderpole, Mr. Coulson, then," he added. "Do I understand that this young man came to you as a complete stranger?"

"Absolutely," Mr. Coulson answered. "I never saw him before in my life. As decent a young chap as ever I met with, all the same," he went on, "and comes of a good American stock, too. They tell me there's going to be an inquest and that I shall be summoned, but I know nothing more than what I've told you. If I did, you'd be welcome to it."

Mr. Jacks leaned back in his chair. Certainly the situation increased in perplexity! The man by his side was talking now of the adaptation of one of his patents to some existing machinery, and Jacks watched him covertly. He considered himself, to some extent, a physiognomist. He told himself it was not possible that this man was playing a part. Mr. James B. Coulson sat there, the absolute incarnation of the genial man of affairs, interested in his business, interested in the great subject of dollar-getting, content with himself and his position,--a person apparently of little imagination, for the shock of this matter concerning which they had been talking had already passed away. He was doing his best to explain with a pencil on the back of an illustrated paper some new system of wool-bleaching.

"Mr. Coulson," the Inspector said suddenly, "do you know a young lady named Miss Penelope Morse?"

It was here, perhaps, that Mr. Coulson sank a little from the heights of complete success. He repeated the name, and obviously took time to think before he answered.

"Miss Penelope Morse," the Inspector continued. "She is a young American lady, who lives with an invalid aunt in Park Lane, and who is taken everywhere by the Duchess of Devenham, another aunt, I believe."

"I suppose I may say that I am acquainted with her," Mr. Coulson admitted. "She came here the other evening with a young man--Sir Charles Somerfield."

"Ah!" the Inspector murmured.

"She'd read that interview of mine with the Comet man," Mr. Coulson said, "and she fancied that perhaps I could tell her something about Hamilton Fynes."

"First time you'd met her, I suppose?" the Inspector remarked.

"Sure!" Mr. Coulson answered. "As a matter of fact, I know very few of my compatriots over here. I am an American citizen myself, and I haven't too much sympathy with any one, man or woman, who doesn't find America good enough for them to live in."

The Inspector nodded.

"Quite so," he agreed. "So you hadn't anything to tell this young lady?"

"Not a thing that she hadn't read in the Comet," Mr. Coulson replied. "What brought her into your mind, anyway?"

"Nothing particular," the Inspector answered carelessly. "Well, Mr. Coulson, I won't take up any more of your time. I am convinced that you have told me all that you know, and I am afraid that I shall have to look elsewhere to find the loose end of this little tangle."

"Stay and have another drink," Mr. Coulson begged. "I've nothing to do. There are one or two boys coming in later who'll like to meet you."

The Inspector shook his head.

"I must be off," he said. "I want to get into my office before six o'clock. I dare say I shall be running across you again before you go back."

He shook hands and turned away. Then Mr. Coulson made what was, perhaps, his second slight mistake.

"Say, Mr. Jacks," he exclaimed, "what made you mention that young lady's name, anyway? I'm curious to know."

The Inspector looked thoughtfully at the end of the fresh cigar which he had just lit.

"Well," he said, "I don't know that there was anything definite in my mind, only it seems a little strange that you and Miss Penelope Morse should both have been acquainted with the murdered man and that you should have come across one another."

"Sort of bond between us, eh?" Mr. Coulson replied. "She seemed a very charming young lady. Cut above Fynes, I should think."

The detective smiled.

"All your American young ladies who come over here are charming," he said. "Goodbye, Mr. Coulson, and many thanks!"

The Inspector passed out, and the man whom he had come to visit, after a moment's hesitation, resumed his seat.

"These aren't American methods," he muttered to himself. "I don't understand them. That man Jacks is either a simpleton or he is too cunning for me."

He crossed to a writing table and scribbled an unnecessary note, addressing it to a firm in the city. Then he rang for a messenger boy and handed it to him for delivery. A few minutes afterwards he strolled out into the hall. The boy was in the act of handing the note to one of the head porters, who carefully copied the address. Mr. Coulson returned to the smoking room, whistling softly to himself.