CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH HUGH DRUMMOND AND THE REVEREND THEODOSIUS LONGMOOR TAKE LUNCH TOGETHER

"Rot, Hugh!" Peter turned a little irritably from his covert inspection of the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor. "You've got Peterson on the brain. Why, that old bird is no more like him than my boot."

"Nevertheless, it's Peterson," answered Drummond doggedly. "Don't look at him, Peter; don't let him think we're talking about him on any account. I admit he bears not the slightest resemblance to our one and only Carl, but he's no more unlike him than the Comte de Guy was that time in Paris. It's just that one little trick he can never shake off—that tapping with his left hand on his knee—that made me spot him."

"Well, granted you're right," conceded Darrell grudgingly, "what do we do now, sergeant-major?"

Drummond lit a cigarette thoughtfully before he replied. Half-hidden by a large luncheon party which was just preparing to move into the restaurant, he stole another look at the object of their remarks. With an expression
of intense benevolence the Reverend Theodosius was chatting with an elderly lady, and on Drummond’s face, as he turned back was a faint grin of admiration. Truly in the matter of disguises the man was a living marvel.

“I don’t know, Peter,” he answered after a while. “I’ve got to think this out. It’s been so sudden that it’s got me guessing. I know it’s what we’ve been hoping for; it’s what we wrote that letter to the paper for—to draw the badger. And by the Lord! we’ve drawn him, and the badger is Peterson. But somehow or other I didn’t expect to find him disguised as a Mormon missionary residing at the Ritz.”

“You’re perfectly certain, Hugh?” said Peter, who was still far from convinced.

“Absolutely, old man,” answered Drummond gravely. “The clergyman over there is Carl Peterson, late of the Elms, Godalming. And the game has begun again.”

Darrell gave a short laugh as he noted the gleam in his leader’s eyes.

“I’m thinking,” he remarked soberly, “that this time the game is going to make us go all out.”

“So much the better,” grinned Hugh. “We’ll add him to our collection, Peter, and then we’ll present the whole damned bunch to the Zoo. And, in the meantime, he shall lunch with us when Phyllis arrives, and prattle on theology to an appreciative audience. Incidentally it will appeal to his sense of humour; there’s no difficulty about recognising us.”

“Yes,” agreed Peter, “we start one up
there. He doesn't know that we've spotted him. I wonder where the diamonds come in, Hugh?"

"Darned intimately, from what I know of the gentleman. But that's only one of several little points that require clearing up. And in the next few days, Peter, my boy—we will clear them up."

"Or be cleared up ourselves," laughed Darrell. "Look out, he's coming over."

They turned as the clergyman crossed the lounge towards them.

"Jolly old tum-tum beginning to shout for nourishment," said Hugh with an affable smile as he joined them. "My wife should be here at any moment now, Mr.—er—"

"Longmoor is my name," said the clergyman, beaming on them. "It is very charming of you to take such compassion on a lonely old man."

"Staying here all by yourself?" asked Drummond politely.

"No; my daughter is with me. The dear child has been my constant companion ever since my beloved wife's death some years ago."

He polished his glasses, which had become a little misty, and Drummond made noises indicative of sympathy.

"You wouldn't believe the comfort she has been to me. In these days, when it seems to me that the modern girl thinks of nothing but dancing and frivolity, it is indeed a blessing to find one who, while preserving her winsome sense of humour, devotes her life to the things
that really matter. In our recent tour in Austria—I beg your pardon, you said—"

"Nothing," answered Drummond quietly. "You have been to Austria, you say?"

"Yes; we have just returned from a visit to the famine-stricken area," replied the clergyman. "Most interesting—but most terribly sad. You know—I don’t think I caught your name."

"Drummond, Captain Drummond," answered Hugh mechanically. "And this is Mr. Darrell. I think I have had the pleasure of making your daughter’s acquaintance already. She was manufacturing woollen garments for the Austrians down here, and I retrieved an elusive ball of wool for her."

"That is just my daughter all over, Captain Drummond," beamed the Reverend Theodosius. "Never wasting her time, always doing something for the good of humanity."

But at the moment it is to be regretted that Hugh was not worrying his head over the good of humanity. Inconceivable though it was, judged on the mere matter of appearance, that the Reverend Theodosius was Carl Peterson, it was still more inconceivable that the wool knitter with the heart of gold could be Irma. Of course Peterson might have changed his daughter—but if he hadn’t, what then? What had he said to Peter Darrell when the girl, recognising him all the time, was sitting in the next chair? How much had she overheard? And suddenly Hugh began to feel that he was floundering in deep waters. How many cards did the other side hold? and,
what was even more important, how many of his own cards had they placed correctly? And glancing up he found the reverend gentleman’s blue eyes fixed on him and glinting with a certain quizzical humour. Assuredly, reflected Drummond, it was up to him to find out, and that as soon as possible, exactly how matters stood. The trouble was how to set about it. To greet the Reverend Theodosius as a long-lost friend and ask him whether the disguise was donned to amuse the children would certainly precipitate affairs, but it would also throw one of his best cards on the table. And Carl Peterson was not a gentleman with whom it was advisable to weaken one’s hand unnecessarily. So it all boiled down to a policy of waiting for the other side to play first, which, in view of the fact that he was getting distinctly peckish, seemed to Hugh to be an eminently sound decision.

He glanced at his watch and turned to Darrell.

"Confound the girl, Peter! She’s nearly forty minutes late."

"Picked up a pal, old boy," answered that worthy. "Picked up a pal and they’re masticating a Bath bun somewhere. Why not leave a message at the door, and let’s get on with it? I’m darned hungry."

The Reverend Theodosius beamed from behind his spectacles.

"'Tis ever the same," he murmured gently.

“But it is the prerogative of their sex."

“Well, let’s toddle in and take nourishment," said Hugh, taking hold of the clergy-
man's arm with his hand and pushing him towards the restaurant. "Jove! Mr. Longmoor—you've got some pretty useful biceps on you."

The other smiled as if pleased with the compliment.

"Nothing to you, Captain Drummond, to judge by your size, but I think I may say I'm a match for most men. My ministry has led me into some very rough corners, and I have often found that where gentle persuasion fails, force will succeed."

"Quite so," murmured Drummond, gazing at the menu. "Nothing like a good one straight on the point of the jaw for producing a devout manner of living in the recipient. Often found that out myself. By the way, what about the daughter? Isn't she going to honour us?"

"Not to-day," answered the Reverend Theodosius. "She is lunching upstairs with the poor fellow I told you about, whose office was wrecked last night. He is sadly in need of comfort."

"I'll bet he is," agreed Hugh. "But if he put on one of those jolly little things she's knitting and trotted up and down Piccadilly he'd soon get all the money back for your chancel steps. The man I'm sorry for is the poor devil who was found adhering to the wall."

The Reverend Theodosius glanced at him thoughtfully, and Drummond realised he had made a slip.

"You seem to know quite a lot about it,
Captain Drummond,” murmured the other, dissecting a sardine.

“It’s in the early editions of the evening papers,” returned Hugh calmly. “Pictures and everything. The only thing they’ve left out is that reference to your little lump of dough.”

“In such a dreadful thing as this, a trifle like that might well be overlooked,” said the Reverend Theodosius. “But I understand from my poor friend upstairs that the police are satisfied that three scoundrels were involved in the crime. And two of them have escaped.”

“Dirty dogs,” said Hugh, frowning. “Now if all three had been found adhering to the furniture it might have reconciled you to the loss of those hundred acid drops.”

“In fact,” continued the clergyman, helping himself to some fish, “the whole thing is very mysterious. However, the police have every hope of laying their hands on the two others very shortly.”

“They’re always optimistic, aren’t they?” returned Hugh. “Pity no one saw these blighters running round and throwing bombs about the house.”

“That is just the fortunate thing, Captain Drummond,” said the other mildly. “Far be it from me to desire vengeance on any man, but in this case I feel it is deserved. The unfortunate clerk downstairs who was brutally assaulted by them has confided to his employer that he believes he knows who one of the other two was. A huge man, Captain Drummond,
of enormous strength: a man—well, really, do you know?—a man I should imagine just like you, and a man, who, popular rumour has it, is the head of a mysterious body calling itself the Black Gang. So that should prove a valuable clue for the police when they hear of it.”

Not by the flicker of an eyelid did Drummond’s face change as he listened with polite attention to the clergyman’s remarks. But now once again his brain was moving quickly as he took in this new development. One card, at any rate, was down on the table: his identity as leader of the Black Gang was known to Peterson. It was the girl who had found him out: that was obvious. The point was how did it affect matters.

“An elusive person, I believe,” he remarked quietly. “We’ve heard quite a lot of him in the papers recently. In fact, I was actually in Sir Bryan Johnstone’s office when a gentleman of the name of Charles Latter came and demanded protection from the Black Gang.”

For a moment a gleam of amazement shone in the other’s eye.

“You surprise me,” he murmured. “I trust it was afforded him.”

Hugh waved a vast hand.

“Do you doubt it, Mr. Longmoor? I personally accompanied him to a house-party to ensure his safety. But as I told old Tum-tum afterwards—that’s Sir Bryan Johnstone, you know, a great pal of mine—nothing that I could do could avert the catastrophe. I prattled to him gently, but it was no good.
He went mad, Mr. Longmoor—quite, quite mad. The boredom of that house-party unhinged his brain. Have another chop?"

"How very extraordinary!" remarked the clergyman. "And what did your friend—er—Tum-tum say when he heard of the results of your supervision?"

"Well, quite unofficially, Mr. Longmoor, I think he was rather pleased. Latter was an unpleasant man, engaged in unpleasant work, and he does less harm when insane. A merciful thing, wasn't it, that we found such a suitable gathering of guests at our disposal?"

"And yet," pursued the Reverend Theodosius, "it struck me from an English paper I happened to pick up in Paris a little while ago, that the leader of this obscure gang claimed in some way to be responsible for the condition of Mr. Latter. He issued a ridiculous sort of manifesto to the Press, didn't he?"

"I believe he did," answered Drummond, draining his glass. "An effusion which ended with a threat to the people at the back of men like Latter. As if it would have any effect! Scum like that, Mr. Longmoor, remain hidden. They blush unseen. I do wish you'd have another chop."

"Thank you—no." The Reverend Theodosius waved away the waiter and leaned back in his chair. "Doubtless you are right, Captain Drummond, in championing this person; but if what this wretched, ill-treated clerk says is correct, I am afraid I can look on him as nothing less than a common thief. Of course, he may have made a mistake, but he seems
very positive that one of the miscreants last
night was the leader of the Black Gang him-
self."

"I see," said Drummond, with the air of
a man on whom a great truth had dawned.
"That hundred thick 'uns still rankling in the
grey matter what time the vestry collapses."

"Hardly that," returned the clergyman
severely. "My friend, whose office was
wrecked, was amongst other things a dealer in
precious stones. Last night in his desk were
six magnificent diamonds—entrusted to him
for sale by a—well, I will be discreet—by a
well-known Russian nobleman. This morning
he finds them gone—vanished—his room
wrecked. Why, my heart bleeds for him."

"I'll bet it does," answered Drummond
sympathetically. "Darned careless, isn't it,
the way some of these people drop bombs
about the place? Still, if your pal. circulates
an exact description of the diamonds to the
police, he'll probably get 'em back in time. I
suppose," he added by way of an afterthought,
"I suppose he can go to the police about it?"

"I don't quite understand you, Captain
Drummond." The Reverend Theodosius stared
at his host in surprise.

"One never knows, these days, does one?"
said Hugh mildly. "Dreadful thing to get a
nice little bunch of diamonds shot at one's
head, and then find you've got stolen property.
It puts the next fellow who pinches them
rather on velvet. A cup of coffee, won't you?"

"Fortunately nothing of that sort exists in
this case. Yes, thank you, I would like some coffee.”

“Good,” said Hugh, giving the order to the waiter. “So that all you’ve got to do—or rather your pal—is to tell the police that the office was blown up by the leader of the Black Gang, and that the diamonds were pinched by the leader of the Black Gang, and that you would like his head on a silver salver by Wednesday week. It seems too easy to me. Cigarette? Turkish this side—gaspers the other.”

“Thank you.” The Reverend Theodosius helped himself from the case Hugh was holding out. “It certainly does seem easy, the way you put it.”

“The only small trifle which seems to jut out from an otherwise clear-cut horizon is too ridiculous to worry about.”

“And that is?”

“Why—who is the leader of the Black Gang? It would be a dreadful affair if they brought the wrong bird’s head on a charger. No diamonds; no Bradburys; no nothing.”

“I don’t anticipate that it should be hard to discover that, Captain Drummond,” said the clergyman mildly. “Surely with your marvellous police system . . .”

“And yet, Mr. Longmoor,” said Hugh gravely, “even though lately I have been reinforcing that system—literally helping them myself—they are still completely in the dark as to his identity.”

“Incredible,” cried the other. “Still we can only hope for the best. By the way, I’m
afraid your wife has finally deserted you for lunch.” He pushed back his chair. “I shall hope to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance some other day. And now if you will excuse me, I must run away. My correspondence at the moment with regard to the relief funds for destitute Austrians is very voluminous. A thousand thanks for a most enjoyable meal.”

He bowed with a courteous smile, and threaded his way through the crowded restaurant towards the door. And it was not until he had finally disappeared from sight that Hugh turned to Peter Darrell with a thoughtful expression on his face.

“Deuced interesting position of affairs, Peter,” he remarked, lighting another cigarette. “He knows I’m the leader of our bunch, and doesn’t know I know it; I know he’s Peterson, and he doesn’t know I know it. I wonder how long it will be before the gloves come off.”

“Supposing he keeps out of it himself, and gives you away to the police,” said Peter. “It’ll be rather awkward, old son.”

“Supposing he does, it would be,” grinned Hugh. “I’d love to see Tum-tum’s face. But, my dear old Peter, hasn’t your vast brain grasped the one essential fact, that that is precisely what he can’t do until he’s certain I haven’t got the diamonds? Apart altogether from a variety of very awkward disclosures about Number 5, Green Street—he, or his hunchback friend, would have to explain how they gained possession in the first place of
those stones. I made discreet inquiries this morning, Peter, and that rose-pink diamond was one of the Russian Crown jewels. Awkward—very."

He smiled and ordered two brandies.

"Very, very awkward, Peter—but with distinct elements of humour. And I'm inclined to think the time is approaching when the seconds get out of the ring."