

THE BAT

A Novel from the Play
By Mary Roberts Rinehart
and Avery Hopwood

STORY FROM THE START

Defying all efforts to capture him, after a long series of murders and robberies, a super-crook known to the police only as "The Bat" has brought about a veritable reign of terror. At his wife's end, and at the man's own request, the chief of police assigns his best operative, Anderson, to get on the trail of the Bat. With her niece, Dale Ogden, Miss Cornelia Van Gorder is living in the country home of the late Courtleigh Fleming, who until his recent death had been president of the Union bank, wrecked because of the theft of a large sum of currency. Miss Van Gorder receives a note warning her to vacate the place at once on pain of death.

CHAPTER II—Continued

It was true. The room in which she stood, while comfortable and charming, seemed unusually accessible to the night prowler. A row of French windows at the rear gave upon a little terrace—below the terrace the drive curved about and beneath the billiard room windows in a hairpin loop, drawing up again at the main entrance on the other side of the house. At the left of the French windows (if one faced the terrace, as Miss Cornelia was doing) was the alcove door she spoke of. When open, it disclosed a little alcove, almost entirely devoted to the foot of a flight of stairs that gave direct access to the upper regions of the house. The alcove itself opened on one side upon the terrace and upon the other into a large butler's pantry. The arrangement was obviously designed so that, if necessary, one could pass directly from the terrace to the downstairs service quarters or the second floor of the house without going through the living room, and so that trays could be carried up from the pantry by the side stairs without using the main staircase.

The middle pair of French windows were open—forming a double door. Miss Cornelia went over to them—shut them—tried the locks. "Humph! Flimsy enough!" she thought. Then she turned toward the billiard room. The billiard room, as has been said, was the last room to the right in the main wing of the house. A single door led to it from the living room. Miss Cornelia passed through this door, glanced about the billiard room, noting that most of its windows were too high from the ground to greatly encourage a marauder, and locked the only one that seemed to her particularly tempting—the billiard room window on the terrace side of the house. Then she returned to the living room and again considered her defenses.

Three points of access from the terrace to the house—the door that led into the alcove—the French windows of the living room—the billiard room window. On the other side of the house there was the main entrance, the porch, the library and dining room windows. The main entrance led into a hall—living room, and main door of living room on the right as one entered, dining room and library on the left, main staircase in front. She sat down once more, and taking a pencil and a piece of paper, drew a plan of the lower floor of the house.

"And now I've studied it," she thought, after a while, "I'm no further than I had't. As far as I can figure out, there's so many ways for a clever man to get into this house that I'd have to be a couple of Siamese twins to watch it properly."

But of course she was not entirely shut off from the world, even if the worst developed. She considered the telephone instruments on a table near the wall, one the general phone, the other connecting a house line which also connected with the garage and the greenhouses. The garage would not be helpful, since Slocum, her chauffeur for many years, had gone back to England for a visit. Dale had been driving the car. But with an able-bodied man in the gardener's house—

She pulled herself together with a jerk.

"Cornelia Van Gorder, you're going to go crazy before nightfall, if you don't take hold of yourself. What you need is lunch—and a nap in the afternoon if you can make yourself take it. You'd better look up that revolver of yours, too, that you bought when you were going to take a trip to China. You've never fired it off yet, but you've got to sometime today—there's no other way of telling if it will work. You can shut your eyes when you do it—no, you can't either—that's silly."

"Call you a spirited old lady, do they? Well, you never had a better time to show your spirit than now!" Dale Ogden, taxi-ing up from the two o'clock train some time later, discovered the front door locked, to her surprise, and rang for some time before she could get an answer. At last, Billy appeared, white-coated, with an inscrutable expression on his face.

"Will you take my bag, Billy—think. Where is Miss Van Gorder—taking a nap?"

"No," said Billy succinctly. "She takes no nap. She out in scrubbery shooting."

Dale stared at him incredulously. "Shooting, Billy?"

"Yes, ma'am. At least—she not

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shoot yet but she say she going to soon."

"But, good heavens, Billy—shooting what?"

"Shooting pistol," said Billy, his yellow mask of a face preserving its impish repose. He waved his hand. "You go scrubbery. You see."

The scene that met Dale's eyes when she finally found the "scrubbery" was indeed a singular one. Miss Van Gorder, her back firmly planted against the trunk of a large elm tree and an expression of ineffable distaste on her features, was holding out a blunt, deadly looking revolver at arm's length. Its muzzle wavered, now pointing at the ground, now at the sky. Behind the tree Lizzie sat in a heap, moaning quietly to herself, and now and then appealing to the saints to avert a visioned calamity.

As Dale approached, unseem, the climax came. The revolver steadied, pointed ferociously at an inoffensive grass-blade some ten yards from Miss Van Gorder and went off. Lizzie promptly gave vent to a shrill Irish scream. Miss Van Gorder dropped the revolver like a hot potato and opened her mouth to tell Lizzie not to be such a fool. Then she saw Dale—her mouth went into a round O of horror and her hand clutched weakly at her heart.

"Good heavens, child!" she gasped. "Didn't Billy tell you what I was doing? I might have shot you like a rabbit!" and, overcome with emotion, she sat down on the ground and started to fan herself mechanically with a cartridge.

Dale couldn't help laughing—and the longer she looked at her aunt the more she laughed—until that dignified lady joined in the mirth herself.

"Aunt Cornelia—Aunt Cornelia!" said Dale when she could get her breath. "That I've lived to see the day—and they call us the wild generation! Why on earth were you having pistol practice, darling—has Billy turned into a Japanese spy, or what?"

Miss Van Gorder rose from the ground with as much staidness as she could muster, under the circumstances.

"No, my dear—but there's no fool like an old fool—that's all," she stated. "I've wanted to fire that infernal revolver off ever since I bought it two years ago—and now I have and I'm satisfied. Still," she went on thoughtfully, picking up the weapon, "it seems a very good revolver—and shooting people must be much easier than I supposed. All you have to do is to point the—the front of it—like this and—"

"Oh, Miss Dale, dear Miss Dale!" came in woebegone accents from the other side of the tree. "Fee the love of heaven, Miss Dale, say no more but take it away from her—she'll have herself all riddled through with bullets like a kitchen sieve—and me too—if she's let to have it again."

"Lizzie, I'm ashamed of you!" said Lizzie's mistress, briskly. "Come out from behind that tree and stop walling like an automobile siren. This weapon is perfectly safe in competent hands and—" She seemed on the verge of another demonstration of its powers.

"Miss Dale, for the dear love o' God, will you make her put it away?" Dale added her protestations to Lizzie's. "Please, darling, if you want to practice, Billy can sit up some sort of target range—but I don't want my favorite aunt assassinated by a ricocheted bullet before my eyes!"

"Well—perhaps it would be best to try again another time," admitted Miss Van Gorder. But there was a wistful look in her eyes as she gave the revolver to Dale and the three started back to the house.

"I should never have allowed Lizzie to know what I was doing," she confided in a whisper, on the way. "A woman is perfectly capable of managing firearms—but Lizzie is really too nervous to live, sometimes."

"I know just how you feel, darling," Dale agreed, suppressed mirth shaking her as the little procession reached the terrace. "But—oh," she could keep it no longer, "oh—you did look funny, darling—sitting under that tree, with Lizzie on the other side of it making banshee noises and—"

Miss Van Gorder laughed, too, a little shamefacedly.

"I must have," she said. "But—oh, you needn't shake your head, Lizzie Allen—I am going to practice with it—there's no reason I shouldn't—and you never can tell when things like that might be useful," she ended rather vaguely. She did not wish to alarm Dale with her suspicions yet.

"There, Dale—yes, put it in the drawer of the table—that will reassure Lizzie. Lizzie, you might make us some lemonade, I think—Miss Dale must be thirsty after her long, hot ride."

"Yes, Miss Cornelia," said Lizzie, recovering her normal calm as the revolver was shut away in the drawer of the large table in the living room. But she could not resist one parting shot. "And thank God his lemonade I'll be making—and not bandages for bullet wounds!" she

muttered, darkly, as she went toward the service quarters.

Miss Van Gorder glared after her departing back. "Lizzie is really impossible, sometimes!" she said with stately ire. Then her voice softened. "Though, of course, I couldn't do without her," she added.

Dale stretched out on the settee opposite her aunt's chair. "I know you couldn't, darling. Thanks for thinking of the lemonade." She passed her hand over her forehead in a gesture of fatigue. "I am hot—and tired."

Miss Van Gorder looked at her keenly. The young face seemed curiously worn and haggard in the clear afternoon light.

"You—you don't really feel very well, do you, Dale?"

The girl turned her face a little away from her aunt's scrutiny.

"Oh—it's nothing. I feel all right—really."

"I could send for Doctor Wells, if—"

"Oh, heavens, no, Aunt Cornelia." She managed a wan smile. "It isn't as bad as all that. I'm just tired and the city was terribly hot and noisy and—" She stole a glance at her aunt from between lowered lids. "I got your gardener, by the way," she said, casually.

"Did you dear? That's splendid, though—but I'll tell you about that later. Where did you get him?"

"That good agency—I can't remember it's name." Dale's hand moved restlessly over her eyes, as if remembering details were too great an effort. "But I'm sure he'll be satisfactory—he'll be out here this evening—he—he couldn't get away before, I believe. What have you been doing all day, darling?"

"We have had a domestic upheaval. The cook and the housemaid have left—if you'd only waited till the next train you could have had the pleasure of their company into town."

"Aunt Cornelia—how exciting! I'm so sorry! Why did they leave?"

"Why do servants ever leave a good place?" said Miss Cornelia grimly. "Because if they had sense enough to know when they were well off, they wouldn't be servants. Anyhow, they've gone—we'll have to depend on Lizzie and Billy the rest of this week. I telephoned—but they couldn't promise me any others before Monday."

"And I was in town and could have seen people for you—if I'd only known!" said Dale remorsefully.

"Only," she hesitated, "I mightn't have had time—at least I mean there were some other things I had to do, besides getting the gardener and—"

She rose. "I think I will go and lie down for a little if you don't mind, darling."

Miss Van Gorder was concerned. "Of course I don't mind but—won't you even have your lemonade?"

"Oh, I'll get some from Lizzie in the pantry, before I go up," Dale managed to laugh. "I think I must have a headache, after all," she said. "Maybe I'll take an aspirin. Don't worry, darling."

"I shan't. I only wish there were something I could do for you, my dear."

Dale stopped in the alcove doorway. "There's nothing anybody can do for me, really," she said soberly. "At least—oh, I don't know what I'm saying! But don't worry. I'm quite all right. I may go over to the Country club, after dinner—and dance. Won't you come with me, Aunt Cornelia?"

"Depends on my escort," said Miss Cornelia tartly. "If our landlord, Mr. Richard Fleming, is taking you, I certainly shall—I don't like his looks and never did!"

Dale laughed. "Oh, he's all right," she said. "Drinks a good deal and wastes a lot of money—but harmless enough. No—this is a very sedate party—I'll be home early."

"Well, in that case," said her aunt, "I shall stay here with Lizzie and my outja-board will furnish it. She's lshment for the very cowardly way

she behaved this afternoon—and the outja-board. Lizzie deserves some punishment to death to touch the thing—I think she believes it's alive."

"Well, maybe I'll send you a message on it from the Country club," said Dale lightly. She had paused, half-way up the flight of side-stairs in the alcove, and her aunt noticed how her shoulders drooped, belying the lightness of her voice. "Oh," she went on, "by the way—have the afternoon papers come yet? I didn't have time to get one when I was rushing for the train."

"I don't think so, dear—but I'll ask Lizzie," Miss Cornelia moved toward a bell-push.

"Oh, don't bother—it doesn't matter. Only if they have, would you ask Lizzie to bring me one when she brings up the lemonade? I want to read about—about the Bat—he fascinates me."

"There was something else in the paper this morning," said Miss Cornelia, idly. "Oh, yes—the Union bank—the bank Mr. Fleming, Senator, was president of has failed. They seem to think the cashier robbed it. Did you see that, Dale?"

The shoulders of the girl on the staircase straightened suddenly. Then they drooped again. "Yes—I saw it," she said in a queerly colorless voice. "Too bad. It must be terrible—to have every one suspect you—and hunt you—as I suppose they're hunting that poor cashier."

"Well," said Miss Cornelia, "a man who wrecks a bank deserves very little sympathy, to my way of thinking."



"Oh, He's All Right," She Said.

But then I'm old-fashioned. Well, dear, I won't keep you. Run along—and if you want an aspirin, there's a box in my top bureau drawer."

"Thanks, darling. Maybe I'll take one and maybe I won't—all I really need is to lie down for a while."

She moved on up the staircase and disappeared from the range of Miss Cornelia's vision, leaving Miss Cornelia to ponder many things. Her trip to the city had done Dale no good, of a certainty. If not actually ill, she was obviously under some considerable mental strain. And why this sudden interest—in the Bat—then in the failure of the Union bank? Was it possible that Dale, too, had been receiving threatening letters?

"I'll be glad when that gardener comes," she thought to herself. "He'll make a man in the house at any rate."

When Lizzie at last came in with the lemonade she found her mistress shaking her head.

"Cornelia, Cornelia," she was murmuring to herself, "you should have taken to pistol practice when you were younger—it just shows how children waste their opportunities!"

CHAPTER III

The Storm Gathers.

The long storm afternoon wore away, sunset came, red and angry, a sunset presaging tempest. A chill crept into the air with the twilight. When

National Emblem of Wales Is Red Dragon

While the harp is a Welsh national instrument, it is not recognized as the national emblem. The national emblem for Wales is the red dragon of Cadwallader, the last of the Welsh kings. This emblem had a place in the royal arms of Great Britain as a supporter in the reign of King Henry VII, but that king, toward the end of his reign, changed the supporters, which were the two white lions of March, to the Welsh dragon on the dexter side, with the white greyhound on the sinister. The latter emblem was representative of either the De Beauforts, his own ancestors, or the Nevilles, the ancestors of his wife, both of these families using the white greyhound as a family badge. In 1528 his son, Henry VIII, used for supporters to the royal arms the golden lion on the dexter, while the red dragon of Wales, which his father had used on the dexter, he relegated to the sinister side. These supporters continued in use until the accession (in 1603) of James VI of Scotland as James I of England. James kept the golden lion on the dexter, but changed the red dragon of Wales on the sinister to the unicorn, as in the royal arms of Scotland—an emblem of purity.

Bridge Built by Nature

The Natural bridge is in Rockbridge county, Virginia. It was left by the collapse of the remainder of the roof of a tunnel formed by water percolating through a joint or fissure athwart the stream. The tunnel thus formed was gradually enlarged until all the water of the stream was diverted from the stream bed below the joint of ingress, leaving a bridge. It has a span of 90 feet and is from 50 to 100 feet wide.

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Taste Not in Money

Taste, runs the saying, flaunts no dollar sign. One can spend a million dollars and have a hideous home, and vice versa, one can spend but a few dollars and achieve good taste in the home with simplicity.

Taste is more than a question of education, it is more than a question of breeding. Some few have it to begin with, more achieve it and a great mass of people have it thrust upon them, fortunately. We say fortunately for the majority of home owners are content to let those who have taste design and decorate their houses for them.

Great peat pogs in northern Japan are fast disappearing owing to reclamation of the land.

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The doctor often tells you to do just that; and always says Fletcher's. Other preparations may be just as pure, just as free from dangerous drugs, but why experiment? Besides, the book on care and feeding of babies that comes with Fletcher's Castoria is worth its weight in gold!

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Optimist Points Out

Silver Lining to Cloud

Barney Oldfield, the famous automobilist, said on disembarking at New York from his European tour: "We are capturing more and more of the European automobile trade. In London, Paris, everywhere, you see thousands of American automobiles. Some people say that our trade is going to suffer in Europe now on account of hard times and so on, but for many reasons I don't accept that view. I'm an optimist there."

"The fact is, I'm an optimist everywhere. All things, I claim, have their bright side."

"Take, for instance, the old saying that few people practice what they preach. That is very sad, of course, but how much sadder it would be if we all preached what we practice!"

Boy of Ten Busy Criminal

Police officials of New Brighton, N. Y., are searching for a ten-year-old boy, who was a model pupil during the daytime and a crackman at night. After he was arrested and had confessed to 22 crimes, including 7 of breaking into and entering stores, he disappeared.

Knockout Imminent

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)