



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

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W.N.U. Service

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—To a gathering of anarchists in Harking, London suburb, Zaboloff, foreign agitator, tells of the operations of a body of men who have become a menace to their activities. He is interrupted by the men he is describing (the Black Gang), who break up the meeting, sentencing some of the participants to condign punishment and carrying away others. A memorandum found on Zaboloff gives an address in Hoxton, London, which the leader of the attacking party considers of importance.

CHAPTER II

In Which Scotland Yard Sits Up and Takes Notice.

SIR BRYAN JOHNSTONE, director of criminal investigation, leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling with a frown. His hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets; his long legs were stretched out to their full extent under the big roll-top desk in front of him. He was puzzled, and the report lying on the desk in front of him was the reason.

For perhaps ten minutes he remained motionless, then he leaned forward and touched an electric bell. A girl secretary came quickly into the room.

"Miss Forbes," said Sir Bryan, "I wish you would find out if Chief Inspector Melver is in the building. If so I would like to see him at once; if not, see that he gets the message as soon as he comes in."

The door closed behind the girl, and after a moment or two the man rose from his desk and began to pace up and down the room with long, even strides. Every now and then he would stop and stare at some print on the wall, but it was the blank stare of a man whose mind is engrossed in other matters. His eyes came round to the desk once more, the desk on which the report was lying. It was Inspector Melver's report—hence his instructions to the secretary. It was the report on a very singular matter which had taken place the previous night, and after a while Sir Bryan picked up the typed sheets and glanced through them again. And he was still standing by the desk, idly turning over the pages when the secretary came into the room.

"Chief Inspector Melver is here, Sir Bryan," she announced.

"Tell him to come in, Miss Forbes." A square-jawed, rugged Scotsman, Melver looked the type to whom Holy Writ was Holy Writ only in so far as it could be proved. He was short and thick-set, and his physical strength was proverbial.

"What the dickens is all this about, Melver?" said Sir Bryan with a smile, when the door had shut behind the secretary.

"I wish I knew myself, sir," returned the other seriously. "I've never been so completely defeated in my life."

Sir Bryan waved him to a chair and sat down at the desk.

"I've read your report," he said, still smiling, "and frankly, Melver, if it had been anyone but you, I should have been annoyed. But I know you far too well for that. Look here"—he pushed a box of cigarettes across the table, "take a cigarette and let's hear about it."

"Well, sir," began Melver, "this is briefly what took place. At ten o'clock last night as we had arranged, we completely surrounded the suspected house on the outskirts of Barking. I had had a couple of good men on duty there lying concealed all the while, and when I arrived at about nine-thirty with Sergeant Andrews and half-a-dozen others, they reported to me that at least eight men were inside, and that Zaboloff was one of them. He had been shadowed the whole way down from Limehouse with another man, and both the watchers were positive that he had not left the house. So I posted my men and crept forward to investigate myself. There was a little chink in the wooden shutters of one of the downstairs rooms through which the light was streaming. I took a glimpse through, and found that everything was just as had been reported to me. There were eight of them there, and an unpleasant looking bunch they were, too. Zaboloff I saw at the head of the table, and standing next to him was that man Waldoek who runs two or three of the worst Red pads. There was also Flash Jim, and I began to wish I'd brought a few more men."

Melver smiled ruefully. "It was about the last coherent wish I remember. And," he went on seriously, "what I'm going to tell you now, sir, may seem extraordinary and what one would expect in detective fiction, but as sure as I am sitting in this chair, it is what actually took place. Somewhere from close to, there came the sound of an owl hooting. At the same moment I distinctly heard the noise of what seemed a scuffle, and a stifled curse. And then, and this is what beats me, sir," Melver pounded a huge fist into an equally huge palm. "I was picked up from behind as if I was a baby. Yes, sir, a baby."

Involuntarily Sir Bryan smiled. "You made a good substantial infant, Melver."

"Exactly, sir," granted the inspector. "If a man had suggested such

a thing to me yesterday, I'd have laughed in his face. But the fact remains that I was picked up just like a child in arms, and doped, sir, doped. Me—at my time of life. They chloroformed me, and that was the last I saw of Zaboloff or the rest of the gang."

The inspector leaned forward and stared at his chief.

"You've heard the rumors, sir," he went on after a moment, "the same as I have."

"Perhaps," said Sir Bryan quietly. "But go on, Melver. I'd like to hear what's on your mind."

"It's the Black Gang, sir," said the inspector, leaning forward impressively. "There have been rumors going round, rumors which our men have heard here and there for the past two months. I've heard 'em myself; and once or twice I've wondered. Now I'm sure—especially after what Flash Jim said. That gang is no rumor, it's solid fact."

"Have you any information as to what their activities have been, assuming for a moment it is the truth?" asked Sir Bryan.

"None for certain, sir; until this moment I wasn't certain of its existence. But now—looking back—there have been quite a number of sudden disappearances. We haven't troubled officially, we haven't been asked. Hardly likely when one realizes who the people are who have disappeared."

"All conjecture, Melver," said Sir Bryan. "They may be lying dogs, or they'll turn up elsewhere."

"Well, what about last night?" "For the first time this gang has come into direct contact with us."

"Always assuming the fact of its existence."

"Exactly, sir," answered Melver. "Well, they've got Zaboloff and they've got Waldoek, and they laid eight of us out to cool. I guess they're not to be sneezed at."

With a thoughtful look on his face Sir Bryan rose and strolled over to the window. Though not prepared to go quite as far as Melver, there were certainly some peculiar elements in the situation—elements which he, as head of a big public department, could not officially allow for an instant, however much it might amuse him as a private individual.

"We must find Zaboloff and Waldoek," he said curtly, without turning round. "Waldoek, at any rate, has friends who will make a noise unless he's forthcoming. And..."

But his further remarks were interrupted by the entrance of his secretary with a note.

"For the inspector, Sir Bryan," she said, and Melver after a glance at his chief opened the envelope. For a while he studied the letter in silence, then with an enigmatic smile he rose and handed it to the man by the window.

"No answer, thank you, Miss Forbes," he said, and when they were once more alone, he began rubbing his hands together softly—a sure sign of being excited. "Curtis and Samuel Bauer, both flogged nearly to death and found in a slum off Whitechapel. The note said two of 'em had been flogged."

"So," said Sir Bryan quietly. "These two were at Barking last night?"

"They were, sir," answered the inspector.

"And their line?" queried the chief. "White slave traffic of the worst type," said Melver. "They generally drug the girls with cocaine or some dope frat. What do you say to my theory now, sir?"

"It's another point in its favor, Melver," conceded Sir Bryan cautiously; "but it still wants a lot more proof. And, anyway, whether you're right or not, we can't allow it to continue. We shall be having questions asked in parliament."

Melver nodded portentously. "If I can't lay my hands on a man who can lift me up like a baby and dope me, may I never have another case. Like a baby, sir. Me—"

He opened his hands out helplessly, and this time Sir Bryan laughed outright, only to turn with a quick frown as the door leading to the secretary's office was flung open to admit a man. He caught a vague glimpse of the scandalizing Miss Forbes hovering like a canny eating bird-seed in the background; then he turned to the newcomer.

"Confound it, Hugh," he cried. "I'm busy."

ment of Inspector Melver. "You priceless old bean," boomed Hugh affably. "I gathered from the female bird punching the what-not outside that the great brain was heading—but, my dear old lad, I have come to report a crime. A crime which I positively saw committed with my own eyes; an outrage; a blot upon this fair land of ours."

He sank heavily into a chair and selected a cigarette. He was a vast individual with one of those phenomenally ugly faces which is rendered utterly pleasant by the extraordinary charm of its owners expression. No human being had ever been known to be angry with Hugh for long. He was either moved to laughter by the perennial twinkle in the big man's blue eyes, or he was stunned by a playful blow on the cheek from a fist which rivaled a steam hammer. Of brain he apparently possessed a minimum; of muscle he possessed about five ordinary men's share.

And yet, unlike so many powerful men his quickness on his feet was astounding—as many a good heavyweight boxer had found to his cost. In the days of his youth Hugh Drummond—known more familiarly to his intimates as Bulldog—had been able to do the hundred in a blade over ten seconds. And though the mere thought of such a performance now would have caused him to break out into a cold sweat, he was still quite capable of a turn of speed which many a lighter-built man would have envied.

Between him and Sir Bryan Johnstone existed one of those friendships which are founded on totally dissimilar tastes. At school, for some inscrutable reason, the quiet scholarship of the elder boy had appealed to the kid of fourteen who was even then a mass of brawn. Their friendship started then, and it never died, though their ways lay many poles apart. To Johnstone a well-deserved knighthood and a high position in the land; to Drummond as much money as he wanted and a life of sport.

"Has someone stolen the goldfish?" queried Sir Bryan with mild sarcasm.

"Great Scott! I hope not," cried Hugh in alarm. Phyllis gave me complete instructions about the house before she toddled off. I make a noise like an ant's egg and drop them in the sink every morning. No, old lad of the village, it is something of vast import; a stain upon the escutcheon of your force. Last night—let us whisper it in Gath—I dined and further supped not wisely but too well. In fact I deeply regret to admit that I became a trifle blotto—not to say tanked. Of course it wouldn't have happened if Phyllis had been propping up the jolly old home, don't you know; but she's away in the country with the nightingales and alugs and things. Well, as I say, in the young hours of the morning, I thought I'd totter along home, I'd been with some birds, male birds, Tumkins"—he stared sternly at Sir Bryan, while Melver stiffened into rigid horror at such an incredible nickname—"and when I left it was about 2 a. m. Well, I wandered along through Leicester square, and stopped just outside Scott's to let one of those watering cars water my head for me. While I was lying in the road, steering at the brow, a motor car went past, and it stopped in Piccadilly circus."

Melver's air of irritation vanished suddenly, and a quick glance passed between him and Sir Bryan.

"Nothing much you observe in that, Tumkins," he burbled on, quite unconscious of the sudden attention of his hearers. "But wait, old lad—I haven't got to the motto yet. From this car there stepped large numbers of men; at least so it seemed to me, and you must remember I'd recently had a shampoo. And just as I got abreast of them they lifted out another warrior, who appeared to me to be unconscious. They put him on the pavement and got back into the car again just as I tottered alongside."

"What hell souls," I murmured, "what is this and that, so to speak?"

"Binged, old bean, badly binged," said the driver of the car. "We're leaving him there to cool."

"And with that the car drove off. There was I, Tumkins, in a partially binged condition alone in Piccadilly circus with a bird in a completely binged condition."

"How now," I said to myself. "Shall I go and induce you wate merchant to return—as a matter of fact I was beginning to feel I could do with another whack myself—or shall I leave you here—as your pals observed—to cool?"

"I bent over him as I pondered this

knotty point, and as I did so, Tumkins, I became aware of a strange smell."

Hugh paused dramatically and selected another cigarette, while Sir Bryan flashed a quick glance of warning at Melver, who was obviously bursting with suppressed excitement.

"A peculiar and sickly odor, Tumkins," resumed the speaker with mad-dogging deliberation. "A strange and elusive perfume. A strange and elusive perfume. For a long while it eluded me—that smell; I just couldn't place it. And then suddenly I got it: right in the middle, old boy—plumb in the center of the windpipe. It was chloroform: the old bird wasn't drunk—he was doped."

Completely exhausted, Hugh lay back in his chair, and once again Sir Bryan flashed a warning glance at his exasperated subordinate.

"Would you be able to recognize any of the men in the car if you saw them again?" he asked quietly.

"I should know the driver," answered Hugh after profound thought. "And the bird beside him. But not the others."

"What did you do then?" asked Sir Bryan.

"Well, I brought the brain to bear," answered Hugh, "and decided there was nothing to do. He was doped, and I was bottled—so by a unanimous casting vote of one—I toddled off home. But Tumkins, while I was feeding the goldfish this morning—or rather after lunch—conscience was gnawing at my vitals. And after profound meditation, and consulting with my fellow Denny, I decided that the call of duty was clear. I came to you, Tumkins, as a child flies to its mother. Who better, I thought, than old Tum-tum to listen to my maidenly secrets? And so..."

"One moment, Hugh," Sir Bryan held up his hand. "Do you mind if I speak to Inspector Melver for a moment?"

"Anything you like, old lad," murmured Drummond. "But be merciful. Remember my innocent wife in the country."

And silence settled on the room, broken only by the low-voiced conversation between Melver and his chief in the window. After a while a strangled snore from the chair announced that Drummond was ceasing to take an intelligent interest in things mundane.

school. And he's not quite such a fool as he makes himself out. You remember that extraordinary case over the man Peterson a year or so ago. Well, it was he who did the whole thing. His complete disability to be cunning utterly defeated that master-crook, who was always looking for subtlety that wasn't there. And of course his strength is absolutely phenomenal."

"I know, sir," said Melver doubtfully, "but would he consent to take on such a job—and do exactly as he was told?"

They were both looking out of the window, while in the room behind them the heavy breathing of the sleeper rose and fell monotonously. And when the whole audience is asleep it ceases to be necessary to talk in undertones. Which was why Sir Bryan and the inspector during the next ten minutes discussed certain matters of import which they could not have discussed through megaphones at the Savoy. They concerned Hugh and other things, and the other things particularly were of interest. And they continued discussing these other things until, with a dreadful noise like a racing motor backing, the sleeper sat up in his chair and stretched himself.

"Tumkins," he cried, "I have committed sacrilege. I have slept in the Holy of Holies. Have you decided on my fate? Am I to be shot at dawn?"

Sir Bryan left the window as he sat down at his desk. For a moment or two he rubbed his chin thoughtfully with his left hand, as if trying to make up his mind.

"Would you like to do a job of work, old man?"

Hugh started as if he had been stung by a wasp, and Sir Bryan smiled.

"Not real work," he said reassuringly. "But by mere luck last night you saw something which Inspector Melver would have given a good deal to see. Or to be more accurate, you saw some men whom Melver particularly wants to meet."

"Those blokes in the car you mean?" cried Hugh brightly.

"Those blokes in the car," agreed the other. "Incidentally, I may say there was a good deal more in that little episode than you think; and after consultation with Melver I have decided to tell you a certain amount about it, because you can help us. Hugh, you see, you're one up on Melver; you have at any rate seen these men and he hasn't. Moreover,

you say you could recognize two of them again."

"Good heavens! Tumkins," murmured Hugh aghast, "don't say you want me to tramp the streets of London looking for them."

Sir Bryan smiled.

"We'll spare you that," he answered. "But I'd like you to pay attention to what I'm going to tell you. Last night a very peculiar thing happened to Melver. He and some of his men in the normal course of duty surrounded a certain house in which were some people we wanted to lay our hands on. To be more accurate there was one man there whom we wanted. He'd been shadowed ever since he'd landed in England that morning, shadowed the whole way from docks to the house. And sure enough, when Melver and his men surrounded the house, there was our friend and all his pals in one of the downstairs rooms. It was then that this peculiar thing happened. I gather from Melver that he heard the noise of an owl hooting, also a faint scuffle and a curse. And after that he heard nothing more. He was chloroformed from behind and went straight out of the picture."

"Great Scott!" murmured Hugh, staring incredulously at Melver.

"What an amazing thing!"

"And this is where you come in, Hugh," continued Sir Bryan.

"Me!" Hugh sat up abruptly. "Why me?"

"One of the men inside the room was an interesting fellow known as Flash Jim. He is a burglar of no mean repute, though he is quite ready to tackle any sort of job which carries money with it. And when Melver, having recovered himself in the morning, ran Flash Jim to ground in one of his haunts he was quite under the impression that the men who had doped him and the other officers were pals of Flash Jim. But after he'd talked to him he changed his mind. All Flash Jim could tell him was that on the previous night he and some friends had been discussing business at this house. He didn't attempt to deny that. He went on to say that suddenly the room had been filled with a number of masked men, and that he'd had a clip over the back of the head which knocked him out. After that presumably he was given a whiff of chloroform to keep him quiet, and the next thing he remembers is being kicked back into activity by the policeman at—" Sir Bryan paused a moment to emphasize the point—"at

Piccadilly circus."

"Good Lord!" said Hugh dazedly. "Then that bird I saw last night sleeping it off on the pavement was Flash Jim."

"Precisely," answered Sir Bryan. "But what is far more to the point, old man, it is that the two birds you think you would be able to recognize and who were in the car, are two of the masked men who first of all laid out Melver and subsequently surrounded Flash Jim and his pals inside."

"But what did they want to do that for?" asked Hugh in bewilderment.

"That is just what we want to find out," replied Sir Bryan. "As far as we can see at the moment they are not criminal in the accepted sense of the word. They flogged two of the men who were there last night, and there are no two men in England who more richly deserved it. They kidnaped two others, one of whom was the man we particularly wanted. Then to wind up they planted Flash Jim as I've told you, let the others go, and brought Melver and all his men back to Melver's house, where they left them to cool on the pavement. If we give you warning would you care to go with Melver the next time he has any job on, where he thinks it is likely this gang may turn up? We have a pretty shrewd idea as to the type of thing they specialize in."

Hugh passed his hand dazedly over his forehead.

"Sort of mother's help you mean," and Melver frowned horribly. "While the bird biffs Melver, I biff the bird. Is that the notion?"

"That is the notion," agreed Sir Bryan. "Of course you'll have to do exactly what Melver tells you, and the whole thing is most unusual. But in view of the special features of the case... What is it, Miss Forbes?"

He glanced up at his secretary, who was standing in the doorway with a slight frown.

"He insists on seeing you at once, Sir Bryan."

She came forward with a card, which Sir Bryan took.

"Charles Latter," The frown deepened. "What the deuce does he want?"

The answer was supplied by the gentleman himself, who appeared at that moment in the doorway. He was evidently in a state of great agitation and Sir Bryan rose.

"I am engaged at the moment, Mr. Latter," he said coldly.

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