



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

BY CYRIL MCNEILE SAPPER

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—To a gathering of anarchists in Hoxton, 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 confinement 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.—Sir Bryan Johnston, director of criminal investigation, hears from Inspector Melvor, sent to arrest Zaboloff the night before, of his discomfiture. He had been seized and chloroformed and his raid frustrated. Hugh Drummond, a man of leisure and old friend of Johnston's, arrives and tells of seeing the kidnappers and their victims. He becomes an unpaid agent of the police, to be under the direction of Melvor, and takes up his duties at once.

CHAPTER III.—A "Mr. William Atkinson," ostensibly pawnbroker and money lender, really Count Zaboloff, director of anarchy in England, does business in another London suburb. A mysterious stranger invades the premises. Count Zaboloff, after a brief glimpse of the intruder, is strangely disconcerted.

CHAPTER IV

In Which a Bomb Bursts at Unpleasantly Close Quarters.

IT WAS perhaps because the thought of failure never entered Hugh Drummond's head that such a considerable measure of success had been possible up to date—that, and the absolute, unquestioning obedience which he demanded of his pals, members of the Black Gang, and which they accorded him willingly. As they knew, he laid no claim to brilliance; but as they also knew, he hid a very shrewd common sense beneath his frivolous manner. And having once accepted the sound military truism that one indifferent general is better than two good ones, they accepted his leadership with unswerving loyalty. What was going to be the end of their self-imposed fight against the pests of society did not worry them greatly; all that mattered was that there should be a certain amount of sport in the collection of the specimens. Granted the promise of that, they willingly sacrificed any arguments and carried out Hugh's orders to the letter. Up to date, however, the campaign, though far from being dull, had not produced any really big results. A number of sprats and a few moderate-sized fish had duly been caught in the landing-net, and been sent to the private pool to meditate at leisure. But nothing really large had come their way. Zaboloff was a good haul. But the Black Gang, which aimed merely at the repression of terrorism by terrorism, had found it too easy. The nauseating cowardice of the majority of their opponents was becoming monotonous, their strong aversion to soap and water, insanitary. They wanted big game—not the rats that emerged from the sewers.

Even Drummond had begun to feel that patriotism might be carried too far, until the moment when the address in Hoxton had fallen into their hands. Then, with the optimism that lives eternal in the hunter's breast, fresh hope had arisen in his mind. He had determined on bigger game. If it failed—if they drew blank—he had almost decided to chuck the thing up altogether. Phyllis, he knew, would be overjoyed if he did.

"Just this one final coup, old girl," he said, as they sat waiting in the Carlton for the awe-inspiring relatives. "I've got it cut and dried, and it comes off tonight. If it's a dud, we'll dissolve ourselves—at any rate for the present. If only—"

He sighed, and his wife looked at him reproachfully. "I know you want another fight with Peterson, you old goat," she remarked. "But you'll never see him again, or that horrible girl."

"Don't you think I shall, Phyl?" He stared dependently at his shoes. "I can't help feeling myself that somewhere or other behind all this that cheery bird is lurking. My dear, it would be too ghastly if I never saw him again."

"The next time you see him, Hugh," she answered quietly, "he won't take any chances with you." "But my angel child," he boomed cheerfully. "I don't want him to. Not on your life! Nor shall I. Good Lord! Here they are. Uncle Timothy looks more like a mangel-wortzel than ever."

And so at nine-thirty that evening, a party of five men sat waiting in a small sitting-room of a house situated in a remote corner of South Kensington. Some easels stood around the walls covered with half-finished sketches, as befitting a room belonging to a budding artist such as Toby Sinclair. Not that he was an artist or even a budding one, but he felt that a man must have some excuse for living in South Kensington. And so he had bought the sketches and put them round the room, principally to deceive the landlady. The fact that he was never there except at strange hours, merely confirmed that excellent woman's opinion that all artists were dissolute rascals. But he paid his rent regularly, and times were hard, especially in South Kensington. Had the worthy soul known that her second best sitting-room

street proved easier than Drummond had expected—so easy as to be almost suspicious. No lights shone in the windows above; the house seemed completely deserted. Moreover, the door into the street was unbolting, and without a moment's hesitation Drummond opened it and stepped inside, followed by Martin and Ter Jerningham. The long black cloak had been discarded; only the black mask concealed his face, as the three men stood inside the door, listening intently. Not a sound was audible, and after a moment or two Drummond felt his way cautiously through the downstairs office toward the flight of stairs that led to the rooms above.

In single file they crept up the stairs, Drummond leading. The door at the top was ajar, and for a while they stood in the carpeted passage above listening again.

"Along this passage are the clerks' offices," he explained in a low voice to the other two. "At the far end is another door which we shall probably find locked. Beyond that is the inner office."

"Well, let's go on wiv it, guv'nor," muttered Ginger Martin hoarsely. "There's no good in 'angin' about."

Drummond switched on his electric torch, and flashed it cautiously round. Doors leading off the passage were open in most cases, and all the rooms were empty; it was obvious that none of the staff were about. And yet he felt an indefinable sense of danger, which he tried in vain to shake off. Somehow or other, he felt certain that they were not alone—that there were other people in the house. But Ginger Martin had no such presentiments, and was rapidly becoming impatient. To open the door at the end of the passage, if it should prove to be locked, was such child's play as to be absolutely contemptible. He wanted to get on with the safe, which might take time, instead of fooling round in a passage listening for mice.

Without a sound the cracksman set to work; his coarse features outlined in the circle of the torch, his ill-kept fingers handling his instruments as deftly as any surgeon. A little oil here and there; a steady pressure with a short pointed steel tool, a faint click.

"There you are, guv'nor," he muttered, straightening up. "Easy as kiss yer 'and. And if yer waits till I find me glove I'll open it for yer; but Ginger Martin's finger prints are too well known to run risks."

Still no sound came from anywhere, though the click of the lock shot back had been horribly loud in the silence. And then, just as Martin cautiously turned the handle and pushed open the door, Drummond switched off his torch. He could have sworn that he heard the sound of voices close by.

Only for a second—they were instantly silenced; but just for that fraction of time as the door opened he knew he had heard men speaking. Once again the three men stood motionless, listening intently, but the sound was not repeated. Absolute silence reigned, broken only by the noise of their own breathing. And at last, after what seemed an interminable pause, Drummond switched on his torch again. The passage was empty; the door of the inner office was just in front of them. Almost he was persuaded that he must have made a mistake—that it had been his imagination. He peered through the keyhole; the room was in darkness. He turned the handle cautiously; the door gave to him; and still with his torch held well in front of him, he stepped into the room, turning the light into every corner. Not a trace of anyone; the inner office was absolutely empty. He flashed the light all round the walls, as far as he could see there was no other door—not even a window. Consequently the only way out was by the door through which they had just entered, which was obviously impossible for anyone to have done without his knowledge.

"It is all right!" he muttered turning round to the other two. "Must have been my mistake. Now then, Ginger, let's tackle the big desk; first."

As he spoke he moved into the center of the room, his torch lighting up the big roll-top desk. "Right-ho, guv'nor. Keep this beam on the keyhole—"

The crook bent over his task, only to straighten up suddenly as all the lights went on. "Yer d-d fool!" he snarled. "Switch 'em off! It ain't safe."

"I didn't put 'em on!" snapped Drummond. "Nor I," said Jerningham. "For a moment or two no one spoke; then Ginger Martin made a wild dive

for the door. But the door which had opened so easily a few moments before now refused to budge, though he tugged at it, cursing horribly. And after a while he gave it up, and turned on Drummond like a wild beast.

"You've trapped me, yer—swine. I'll get even with you over this if I swing for it!"

But Drummond, to whom the presence of actual danger was as meat and drink, took not the slightest notice. His brain, ice-cold and clear, he tugged at it, cursing horribly. And after a while he gave it up, and turned on Drummond like a wild beast.

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FROM THE STATE MARKET AGENT

STATUS OF FLAX INDUSTRY IN WILLAMETTE VALLEY.

Many requests for information and advice regarding the new flax industry of the Willamette valley come to the State Market Agent department, and C. E. Spence says he has had to go to the growers themselves ere ask for it will they be warranted in going into flax growing; that only about 4,000 acres were grown in 1925, and that the state contracted for about 2,500 acres. Asked what he thought of farmers going in for increased production he replied:

"I have not gone into the matter very much beyond the needs of our own plant. Our mill manufactures fishnet twine and linen fabrics, and we get our material from the prison plant after they work it up for use. Whether the prison plant will be enlarged to meet increased production, or whether others will put in like plants, I do not know, but certainly this part of the industry must be taken care of if we are to make flax a leading industry of the valley, for mills must have the raw material worked into shape for them. I have been told that the prison plant has about reached its capacity."

NOTICE.

The Willing Workers are prepared to do plain sewing, tack comforts, sew carpet bags, etc., at reasonable prices. See Mrs. Jeff Jones for further information.

J. B. Sparks has entered business in Portland, and is now running the Sparks Cafe at 413 Washington street, opposite the Blue Mouse theater. Associated with Mr. Sparks is Sam Ganger, chef, and they announce that they have just the very best place to eat in the city. Heppner people in Portland are invited to give them a call.

Have Loans in Force Of More Than \$300,000

From the Ione Independent it is learned that the Morrow County Farm Loan association held their annual meeting the past week on Tuesday and elected a full list of officers, as follows: W. J. Blake, president; L. P. Davidson, vice president; C. B. Ruly, secretary and treasurer; A. A. McCabe, E. C. Heliker and Algott Lundell, directors.

The annual routine matters of bus-

ness were transacted and the records of the secretary-treasurer inspected and approved. The association now has in force 61 loans, totaling \$325,000.

One, two or three furnished and heated rooms for rent. See C. A. Minor.

WANTED—To rent ranch in Morrow county; prefer near Heppner. Laurence E. Reaney, Lexington, Oregon.



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