



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

BY CYRIL MCNEILE SAPPER

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 the 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 Melver, sent to arrest Zaboloff the night before, of his discovery. He had been seized and chloroformed and his raid frustrated. Hugh Drummond, 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 Melver, and takes up his duties at once.

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

CHAPTER IV.—Drummond, having knowledge of Atkinson's anarchistic activities, arranges to surveil the latter's office to secure evidence of the fact. While so engaged, with two companions, a bomb is hurled at them from an adjoining room.

CHAPTER V.—The explosion kills "Ginger Martin," expert burglar whom Drummond had employed to open Atkinson's safe. Drummond and his friend escape, taking with them a bag they find on the floor. Neither Drummond nor his companion at the time find out what it contains.

CHAPTER VI

In Which There is a Stormy Party at the Ritz.

IT WAS just about the time that Ginger Martin's wife became, all unconsciously, a widow that the sitting-room bell of a certain private suite in the Ritz was rung. The occupants of the room were two in number—a man and a woman—and they had arrived only that morning from the Continent. The man, whose signature in the register announced him to be the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor—looked a splendid specimen of the right sort of clergyman. Tall, broad-shouldered, with a pair of shrewd, kindly eyes and a great mass of snow-white hair, he was the type of man who attracted attention wherever he went, and in whatever society he found himself. A faint twang in his speech betrayed his nationality, and, indeed, he made no secret of it. He was an American, born and bred, who had been seeing first hand for himself some of the dreadful horrors of the famiae which was ravaging Central Europe.

And with him had gone his daughter Janet—that faithful, constant companion of his, who since her mother's death had never left him. She was a good-looking girl, too—though perhaps unkind people might say girlhood's happy days had receded somewhat into the past. Thirty, perhaps—even thirty-five—though her father always alluded to her as "My little girl."

There was something very sweet and touching about their relationship; his pride in her and her undoubtedly a charming couple, had ple, loving adoration for dad. Unhappily the verdict of their chance acquaintances—so simple, so fresh, so unassuming in these days of complexity and double dealing.

After dinner, because his little Janet was tired, the Reverend Theodosius was engrossed in work; while his little Janet, lying on the sofa, displayed considerably more leg than one would have expected a vicar's daughter even to possess. And once she signally gurgles of laughter seemed to prove that Guy de Maupassant appears to a more catholic audience than he would have suspected.

She was knitting decorously when the waiter came in, and her father ordered a little supper to be sent up. "Some chicken, please, and a little foie gras. I am expecting a friend very soon—so lay for three. Some champagne—yes. Perrier Jouet '04 will do. I'm afraid I don't know much about wine. And a little icky water for my daughter."

The waiter withdrew. "What time do you expect Zadowa?" Janet asked.

"He should have been here by now. I don't know why he's late."

"Did you see him this afternoon?"

"No. I was down at the office, but only for a short while."

The sound of voices outside the door caused Janet to resume her knitting, and the next moment Count Zadowa was announced. For an appreciable time after the waiter had withdrawn he stood staring at them; then a smile crossed his face.

"Magnificent!" he murmured. "Superb, Madame, I felicitate you. Well thought I know your powers, this time you have excelled yourself. I have the most wonderful news for you."

Reverend Theodosius bit the end of a cigar and stared at his visitor with eyes from which every trace of kindness had vanished.

"It's about time you did have some good news, Zadowa," he snapped. "Anything more d-d disgraceful than the way you've led this so-called Black Gang do you in, I've never heard of."

his senses. With a last spasm of fury he hurled the wretched Zadowa into a corner, and left him lying there; then his iron self-control came back to him.

"Get up," he ordered tensely, "and answer some questions."

Trembling all over, the hunchback staggered to his feet and came into the center of the room.

"Monsieur," he whined, "I do not understand. What have I done?"

"You don't need to understand!" snarled the clergyman. "Tell me exactly what happened when the bomb burst."

"It killed the three men, monsieur," stammered the other.

"Curse the three men!" He lifted his clenched fist, and Zadowa shrank back. "What happened to the room?"

"It was wrecked utterly. A great hole was blown in the wall."

"And what happened to the desk?"

"I don't know exactly, monsieur," stammered the other. "I didn't get back to see. But it must have been blown to match-wood. Only as there was nothing inside of importance it makes no odds."

"Did you look in the secret drawer at the back of the center opening?"

"You didn't know there was one, did you? Only I knew of its existence, and short of taking the desk to pieces no one would be able to find it. And you took the desk to pieces, Zadowa, didn't you? Just to kill the leader of this trumpety gang, Zadowa, you cursed fool!"

Step by step the hunchback was retreating before the other, terror convulsing his face, until the wall brought him to an abrupt stop.

"You blew the desk to pieces, Zadowa," continued the Reverend Theodosius standing in front of him, "a desk that contained the six most perfect diamonds in the world, Zadowa. With you destroyed a fortune. What have you got to say?"

"I didn't know, monsieur," cringed the other. "How could I know? When were they put there?"

"I put them there this afternoon for safety. Not in my wildest imagination did I dream that you would start throwing bombs about the place."

"Perhaps they were not destroyed," stammered the hunchback hopefully.

"In which case they are now in the hands of the police. You have one chance, Zadowa, only one. It is that those diamonds are not in the hands of the police. If they are, and you can get them—I will say no more."

"But if they have been destroyed, monsieur?" muttered the other.

"Then, Zadowa, I am afraid you will share their fate."

Almost indifferently the clergyman turned back into the room, taking no more notice whatever of the wretched man who followed him on his knees begging for mercy. And then after a while the hunchback pulled himself together and stood up.

"It was a mistake, monsieur," he said quietly, "which I deeply regret, hardly my fault. I will do my best."

"Let us hope, then, for your sake, Zadowa, that your best will be successful. Now go."

He pointed to the door, and without another word the hunchback went. The girl rose and came over to where the man was standing.

"What diamonds are those you talk about?"

"The man gave a short, hard laugh. 'I didn't tell you,' he answered. There was no object in your knowing for a time. I know your weakness where jewels are concerned too well, my dear; I got them the night before last in Amsterdam. Do you remember that Russian—Stanovich? That wasn't his real name. He was the eldest son of the Grand Duke Georgius, and he had just arrived from Russia."

"The man who took that overdose of his sleeping-draught?" whispered the girl barely above her breath.

The Reverend Theodosius smiled grimly.

"So they decided," he remarked. "He confided to me the night before he came to his sad end what he had been doing in Russia. His father had hidden the family heirlooms from the Bolsheviks, and our friend went over to retrieve them. Most ingenious—the way he got them out of Russia. Such a pity he had a lapse with his sleep drugs."

And now the Reverend Theodosius was snarling like a mad dog.

"By heavens, girl—do you wonder that I nearly killed that fool Zadowa? The coup of a lifetime, safely brought off. Not a trace of suspicion on me—not a trace. And then, after having got them safely into this country, to lose them like that. Why, do you know that one of them was the rose diamond of the Russian crown jewels?"

He was pacing up and down the room, and for a while she stood watching him in silence.

"I'm glad I didn't know about them till now," she said at length. "I might not have stopped you killing him if I had. And it would have been rather awkward."

He gave a short laugh and threw the end of his cigar into the grate.

"No use crying over spilt milk, my dear. Let's go to bed."

But little Janet still stood by the table watching him thoughtfully.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about a rather peculiar coincidence," she answered quietly. "You were too worried over the diamonds to notice it—but it struck me instantly. The leader of this gang—the huge man whom Zadowa killed tonight. Did you notice what his Christian name was? It was Hugh—Zadowa heard one of the others call him by name. Hugh, mon ami; Hugh—and a huge man. A coincidence, I think."

"The man gave a short laugh. 'A very long one, my dear. Too long to bother about.'"

"It would be a pity if he was dead," she went on thoughtfully. "I would have liked to see my Hugh Drummond again."

"If he has been killed, if your suspicion is correct," returned the man, "it will do something toward reconciling me to the loss of the diamonds. But I don't think it's likely. And incidentally he is the only side-show I am going to allow myself during this trip."

Little Janet laughed softly.

"I wonder," she said, "I wonder. Let us, as you say, go to bed."

CHAPTER VII

In Which Hugh Drummond Makes a Discovery.

THE prospect in front of Count Zadowa, alias Mr. Atkinson, was not a very alluring one, and the more he thought about it the less he liked it. Either the diamonds were blown to dust, or they were in the hands of the authorities. In the first event he had the Reverend Theodosius to reckon with; in the second the police. And for preference the police won in a canter.

He was under no delusions, was the hunchback. This mysterious man who ained all his communications by the enigmatic letter X, and whose real appearance was known probably only to the girl who was his constant companion, so wonderful and varied were his disguises, was not a person whom it paid to have any delusions about. With a shudder Count Zadowa remembered the fate of certain men he had known in the past, men who had been employed, even as he was now employed, on one of the innumerable schemes of their chief. No project, from the restoration of a monarch to the downfall of a business combine, was too great for the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor. All that mattered was that there should be money in it. Why he should be interesting himself in the spread of Communism in England it was not for Count Zadowa to inquire, even though he was the head of that particular activity. Presumably he was being paid for it by others; it was no business of Count Zadowa's.

As he undressed that night in the quiet hotel in Bloomsbury where he lived the hunchback cursed bitterly under his breath. It was such a cruel stroke of luck.

He had finally decided that his only method lay in going down to the office the next morning as usual. He would find it, of course, in the possession of the police, and would be told what had happened. And then he would have to trust to luck to discover what he could.

Punctually at half-past nine the next morning he arrived at 5 Green Street. As he had expected, a constable was standing at the door.

"Who are you, sir?" The policeman was barring his entrance.

"My name is Atkinson," said the count, with well-assumed surprise. "May I ask what you're doing here?"

"Haven't you heard, sir?" said the constable. "There was a bomb outrage here last night. Is your office upstairs?"

"A bomb outrage?" Mr. Atkinson gazed at the constable in amazement, and a loafer standing by began to laugh.

"Not 'arf, guv'nor," he remarked cheerfully. "The 'ole ruddy place is gone to blazes."

"My name is Atkinson," admitted the policeman. "Move along, can't you?"

"Orl rite, orl rite," grumbled the other, shambling off. "Not allowed to live soon, we won't be."

"You'd better go up, sir," continued the constable. "The inspector is upstairs."

Mr. Atkinson needed no second invitation. Viewed by the light of day which came streaming in through the great hole in the wall the ruin was complete. In the center—and it was there the hunchback's eyes strayed continually—stood the remains of the desk. And as he looked at it my faint hope he may have cherished vanished completely. It was literally split to pieces in every direction; there was not left a hiding-place for a pea, much less a bag of diamonds.

The inspector was speaking and Mr. Atkinson pulled himself together. He had a part to play, and whatever happened no suspicions must be aroused.

"I feel quite staggered, inspector," His glance traveled to a sinister-looking heap in the corner—a heap roughly covered with an old rug. It was stained a dull red, and from under the rug stretched out two long streams of the same color—streams which were not yet dry.

"What on earth has happened?"

"There seems very little doubt about that, sir," remarked the inspector. "Evidently their idea was burglary. What happened, then, of course, is hard to say exactly. Presumably they started using explosives to force your safe, and explosive is funny stuff, even for the expert."

The inspector waved a hand at the heap in the corner.

"And he—poor devil, was quite an expert in his way. One of the three men, Mr. Atkinson—or what's left of him, Ginger Martin—an old friend of mine."

For a moment Mr. Atkinson's heart stood still. One of the three men! Then, where in heaven's name were the other two?

"One of the three, inspector," he said at length, steepling his voice. "But what happened to the others?"

"That is the amazing thing, sir," answered the inspector. "I can but think that though three men entered the office downstairs, only Martin could have been in here at the time of the explosion. He pulled back the blood-stained rug, and with a shudder Mr. Atkinson contemplated what was underneath. The mangled remains had formed one man and one man only. Then what, he reflected again—what had become of the other two?"

They had been in there—the leader of the Black Gang and one of his pals. Wherefore, somehow, by some miraculous means they must have escaped, and the soul of Count Zadowa grew sick within him.

Suddenly he became aware that the inspector was asking him a question.

"Why, yes," he said, pulling himself together. "That is so. I was here, and had removed almost everything of value. Only some diamonds were left, inspector—and they were in that desk. I have somewhat extensive dealings in precious stones. Was there any trace of them found?"

The inspector laughed grimly.

"You see the room for yourself, sir. But that perhaps supplies us with a motive for the crime. I am afraid your diamonds are either blown to pieces, or in the hands of the other two men, whom I have every hope to

lay my hands on shortly. There is no trace of them here."

In the hands of the other two men! The idea was a new one, which had not yet come into his calculations, so convinced had he been that all three men were dead. And suddenly he felt a sort of blind certainty that the inspector—though in ignorance of the real facts of the case—was right in his surmise. Diamonds are not blown to pieces by an explosion; scattered they might be—disintegrated, no. He felt he must get away to consider this new development.

He crossed over to the jagged hole in the wall and looked out.

"This has rather upset me, inspector," he said after a while. "The South Surrey hotel in Bloomsbury will always find me."

"Right, sir!" The inspector made a note, and then leaned out through the hole with a frown. "Get out of here, you there! Go on, or I'll have you locked up as a vagrant!"

"Orl rite, orl rite! Can't a bloke 'ave a bit o' fun when 'e ain't doing no 'arm?"

The loafer, who had been indignantly moved on from the front door, scrambled down from the lean-to roof behind, and slouched away, muttering darkly. And he was still muttering to himself as he opened the door of a taxi a few minutes later, into which Mr. Atkinson hurriedly stepped.

For a moment or two he stood on the pavement until it disappeared from view; then his prowling propensities seemed to disappear as if by magic. Still with the same shambling gait, but apparently now with some definite object in mind, he disappeared down a side street, finally coming to a halt before a public telephone-box. He gave me rapid look around, then he stepped inside.

"Mayfair 1234." He waited beating a tattoo with his pennies on the box. Things had gone well this morning—very well.

"Hello, is that you, Hugh? Yes, Peter speaking. The man Atkinson is the hunchback. Stopping South Surrey hotel, Bloomsbury. He's just got into a taxi and gone off to the Ritz. He seemed peeved to me. . . . Yes, he inquired lovingly about the what-ers. 'What's that?' You'll toddle around to the Ritz yourself. Right ho! I'll come, too. Cocktail time. Give you full details then."

The loafer stepped out of the box and shut the door. Then, still sucking a filthy clay pipe, he shambling off in the direction of the nearest Tube station. A slight change of attire before lining up at the Ritz seemed indicated.

And it would, indeed, have been a shrewd observer who would have identified the immaculately dressed young gentleman who stropped into the Ritz shortly before twelve o'clock with the disolute-looking object who had so roused the wrath of the police a few hours previously in Hoxton. The first person he saw sprawling contentedly in an easy chair was Hugh Drummond, who waved his stick in greeting.

Peter Darrell took the next chair, and his eyes glanced quickly round the lounge.

"Have you seen him, Hugh?" he said, lowering his voice. "I don't see anything answering to the bird growing about the place here."

"No," answered Hugh. "But from discreet inquiries made from old pimply-face yonder I find that he arrived here about ten o'clock. He was at once shown up to the rooms of a gent calling himself the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor, where, as far as I can make out, he has remained ever since. I want to see the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor, Peter."

A ball of wool rolled to his feet, and Hugh stooped to pick it up. The

owner was a girl, sitting close by, busily engaged in knitting some obscure garment, and Hugh handed her the wool with a bow.

"Thank you so much!" she said with a pleasant smile. "I'm afraid I'm always dropping my wool all over the place."

"Don't mention it," remarked Hugh politely. "Deuced agile little thing, a ball of wool. Spend my life picking up my wife's. Everybody seems to be knitting these jumper effects now."

"Oh, this isn't a jumper," answered the girl a little sadly. "I've no time for such frivolities as that. You see, I've just come back from the famine-stricken parts of Austria—and not only are the poor things hungry, but they can't get proper clothes. So just a few of us are knitting things for them—sick sizes, you know—big, medium and small."

"How fearfully jolly of you!" said Hugh admiringly. "Dashed sporting thing to do. I must tell my wife about it. She's coming here to lunch, and she ought to turn 'em out like bullets from a machine gun—what?"

"The girl smiled faintly as she rose. "It would be very good of her if she would be so good as to remark gently, and then with a slight bow, she walked away in the direction of the lift."

"You know, old son," remarked Hugh, as he watched her disappearing. "It's an amazing affair when you really come to think of it. There's that girl, with a face far superior to a patched boot, and positively oozing virtue from every pore. And yet, would you leave your happy home for her? Look at her skirts—five inches too long; yet she'd make a man an excellent wife. A heart of gold, probably, hidden beneath innumerable strata of multi-colored wools."

Completely exhausted he drained his cocktail, and leaned back in his chair, while Peter digested the profound utterance in silence. A slight feeling of lassitude was beginning to weigh on him, owing to the atrocious hour at which he had been compelled to rise, and he felt quite unable to contribute any suitable addition to the conversation. Not that it was required; the furious frown on Drummond's face indicated that he was in the throes of thought and might be expected to give tongue in the near future.

"I ought to have a bit of paper to write it all down on, Peter," he remarked at length. "Where are we, Peter? That is the question. Point one: we have the diamonds—more by luck than good management. Point two: the hunchback gentleman who has a sufficiently strong constitution to live in the South Surrey hotel in Bloomsbury has not got the diamonds. Point three: he, at the present moment, is cloistered with the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor upstairs. Point four: we are about to consume in our cocktail downstairs. Well—bearing that little lot in mind, what happens when we all meet?"

A slight stare was his only answer, and Hugh continued to ponder on the obscurity of the situation in silence. That several rays of light might have been thrown on it by a conversation then proceeding upstairs was of no help to him; nor could he have been expected to know that the fog of war was about to lift in a most unpleasantly drastic manner.

"Coincidence? Boah!" the girl with the heart of gold was remarking at that very moment. "It's a certainty. Whether he's got the diamonds or not I can't say, but your big friend of last night, Zadowa, is sitting downstairs now drinking a cocktail in the lounge."

"Amazing though it is, it certainly

ly looks as if you were right, my dear," answered her father thoughtfully.

"Of course I'm right!" cried the girl. "Why, the darned thing is sticking out and barking at you. A big man, Christian name Hugh, was in Zadowa's office last night. Hugh Drummond is downstairs at the moment, having actually tracked Zadowa here. Of course, they're the same; an infant in arms could see it. His wife is coming here to lunch. You remember her—that silly little fool Phyllis Benton? And they live in Brook street. It might be worth trying. If, by any chance, he has got the diamonds—well, she'll be very useful. And if he hasn't," she shrugged her shoulders, "we can easily return her if we want her."

The Reverend Theodosius smiled. Long-winded explanations between the two of them were seldom necessary. Then he looked at his watch.

"Short notice," he remarked; "but we'll try. No harm done, if we fail." He stepped over to the telephone, and put through a call. And having given two or three curt orders he came slowly into the room.

"Chances of success very small, I'm afraid; but as you say, my dear, worth trying. And now I think I'll renew my acquaintance with Mr. Drummond."

With a short chuckle he left the room, and a minute or two later a benevolent clergyman, reading the Church Times, was sitting in the lounge just opposite Hugh and Peter. Through half-closed eyes Hugh took stock of him, wondering causally if this was the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor. And when a few minutes later the clergyman took a cigarette out of his case, and then commenced to fumble in his pockets for matches which he had evidently forgotten, Hugh rose and offered him one.

"Allow me, sir," he murmured, holding it out.

"I thank you, sir," said the clergyman, with a charming smile. "I'm so terribly forgetful over matches. As a matter of fact I don't generally smoke before lunch, but I've had such a distressing morning that I felt I must have a cigarette just to soothe my nerves."

"By Jove! that's bad," remarked Hugh. "Bath water cold, and all that?"

"Nothing so trivial, I fear," said the other. "No; a poor man who has been with me since ten has just suffered the most terrible blow. I can hardly have believed it possible here in London, but the whole of his business premises were wrecked by a bomb last night."

"You don't say so," murmured Hugh, sinking into a chair, and at the table opposite Peter Darrell opened one eye.

"All his papers—everything—gone. And it has hit me, too. Quite a respectable little sum of money—over a hundred pounds, gathered together for the restoration of the old oak chancel in my church—blown to pieces by this unknown miscreant. It's hard, sir, it's hard. But this poor fellow's loss is greater than mine, so I must not complain."

The clergyman took off his spectacles and wiped them, and Drummond stole a lightning glance at Darrell. The faintest shrug of his shoulders indicated that the latter had heard, and was as much in the dark as Hugh. That this was the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor was now obvious, but what a charming, courteous old gentleman! It seemed impossible to associate guilt with such a delightful person, and, if so, they had made a bad mistake. It was

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When You Get to Florida

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ACTUALLY built on actualities—that is Haines City. There is no flagrantly exaggerated tale of things that may be done; instead, there is to offer to the investor a long list of accomplishments by the residents and developers of Haines City.

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