



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 Barking, 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—Sir Bryan Johnstone, director of criminal investigation, hears from Inspector Melver, sent to arrest Zaboloff the night before, of his discomfiture. He had been seized and chloroformed and his raid frustrated. Hugh Drummond, man of leisure and old friend of Johnstone'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 burglarize 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—At a fashionable hotel Rev. Theodosius Longmoor and his daughter Janet are guests. "Longmoor" is really Carl Peterson, international crook, with whom Drummond has an old feud. Zadowa tells Longmoor and his daughter of the bomb he had hurled, which he believes killed the three invaders. Longmoor is enraged, pointing out that the diamonds (Russian crown jewels, of which Zadowa had known nothing) had been lost through his action. Longmoor insists that Zadowa recover the diamonds, suggesting that they may be in the hands of the police, and warning his subordinate (Longmoor is addressed by Zadowa as "chief") that failure will be punished with death.

CHAPTER VII—Drummond discovers that Longmoor, most cleverly disguised, is Carl Peterson. Janet, at the same time, recognizes in Drummond the leader of the Black Gang, and their old enemy.

CHAPTER VIII—Drummond becomes convinced that Peterson knows he is head of the Black Gang. Zadowa also knows it.

CHAPTER IX—Zadowa, impressed with the belief that Drummond has the diamonds, visits him and makes the proposition that Hugh restore the gems as equivalent to Zadowa's agreeing not to divulge to the police the fact that Drummond is the leader of the Black Gang. Drummond, in answer to the death of Martin and the despicable character of the man before him, thrashes his visitor severely and kicks him out of the house.

CHAPTER X.

In Which Hugh Drummond and the Reverend Theodosius Have a Little Chat.

"Come up, boys," laughed Hugh. "The fog of war is lifting slowly." He led the way back into the study, and the other three followed him.

"That object, Ted, you will be pleased to hear, is the humorist who threw the bomb at us last night."

"The devil it was," cried Jerningham. "I hope you gave him something for me. Incidentally, how did he run you to earth here?"

"Things have moved within the last two or three hours," answered Drummond slowly. "Who do you think is stopping at the Ritz at the present moment? Who do you think lunched with Peter and me today? Why—Peterson, my buckos—no more and no less."

"Rot!" said Toby Sinclair incredulously.

"No more and no less. Peterson himself—disguised as a clergyman called Longmoor. And with him is dear Irma encased in woolen garments. Of course, we're mixed up with that swab I've just kicked down the stairs—in fact, we've booted the fox. The nuisance of it is that by putting two and two together they've spotted me as the leader of our bunch. How, I don't quite know, but they indubitably have. They also think I've got those diamonds; hence the visit of the hunchback, who did not know they were in the desk when he bunged the bomb. In fact, things are becoming clearer all the way round. Hullo! What's this?"

He had opened his desk as he spoke, and was now staring fixedly at the lock.

"It's been forced," he said grimly. "Forced since this morning. They've been over this desk while I've been out. Push the bell, Ted."

They waited in silence till Denny appeared in answer to the ring.

"Someone has been in this room, Denny," said Drummond. "Someone has forced this desk since half-past eleven this morning."

"There's been no one in the house, sir," answered Denny, "except the man who came about the electric light."

"Electric grandmother!" snapped his master. "You paralytic idiot, why did you leave him alone?"

"Well, sir, Mrs. Drummond was in the house at the time—and the servants were all round the place." Denny looked and felt aggrieved, and after a while Drummond smiled.

"What sort of a man was it, you old fatted?"

"A very respectable sort of man," returned Denny with dignity. "I remarked to Mrs. Denny how respectable

he was, sir. Why, he actually went some distance down the street to call a taxi for Mrs. Drummond to go to the Ritz."

His words died away, as he stared in amazement at the expression on his master's face.

"What the devil is it, Hugh?" cried Ted Jerningham.

"He called a taxi, you say?" muttered Drummond. "The man who came here called a taxi?"

"Yes, sir," answered Denny. "He was leaving the house at the same time, and as there was none in sight he said he'd send one along at once."

"And Mrs. Drummond went in the taxi he sent?"

"Certainly, sir," said Denny in surprise. "To the Ritz, to join you. I gave the order myself to the driver."

The veins were standing out on Drummond's forehead, and for a moment it seemed as if he was going to hit his servant. Then with an effort he controlled himself, and sank back in his chair with a groan.

"It's all right, Denny," he said hoarsely. "It's not your fault; you couldn't have known. But—what a fool I've been! And this time wasted, when I might have been doing something."

"But what on earth's happened?" cried Algy.

"She never turned up at the Ritz. Algy: Phyllis never turned up for lunch. At first I thought she was late, and we waited. Then I thought she'd run into some pal and had gone to feed somewhere else. And then, what with talking to Peterson, and later that hunchback, I forgot all about her."

"But, good heavens, Hugh, what do you mean?" said Ted. "You don't think that—"

"Of course I think it. I know it. They've got her; they've kidnapped her. Right under my nose." He rose and began to pace up and down the room with long, uneven strides, while the others watched him anxiously.

"That d-d girl heard me say that she was coming to lunch, and just after that she went upstairs. And Peterson, being Peterson, took a chance—and he's pulled it off."

Algy Longworth stood up, serious for once in a way.

"There's no time now to beat about the bush, Hugh. If they've got Phyllis there's only one possible thing that you can do. Go straight to Bry-an Johnstone and put all of your cards on the table. Tell him the whole thing from A to Z—conceal nothing. And then leave the matter in his hands. He won't let you down."

For a moment or two Hugh faced them undecided. The sudden danger which Phyllis seemed to have robbed him temporarily of his power of initiative; for the time he had ceased to be the leader.

"Algy's right," said Jerningham quietly. "It doesn't matter what happens to us, you've got to think about Phyllis. We'll get it in the neck—but there was always that risk."

"I believe you're right," muttered Hugh, looking around for his hat. "My brain's all buzzing. I can't think—"

And at that moment the telephone bell rang on his desk.

"Answer it, Ted," said Hugh.

Jerningham picked up the receiver.

"Yes—this is Captain Drummond's house. No—it's not him speaking. Yes—I'll give him my message you like. What are you? Who? Mr. Longmoor at the Ritz. I see. Yes—he told me you had lunched with him today. Oh! yes, certainly."

For a while Ted Jerningham stood holding the receiver to his ear, and only the thin, metallic voice of the speaker at the other end broke the silence of the room. It went on, maddeningly indistinct to the three men crowded round the instrument, broken only by an occasional monosyllable from Jerningham. Then with a final—"I will certainly tell him," Ted laid down the instrument.

"What did he say, Ted?" demanded Hugh agitatedly.

"He sent a message to you, old man. It was approximately to this effect—that he was feeling very uneasy because your wife had not turned up for lunch, and that he hoped there had been no accident. He further went on to say that since he had parted from you a most peculiar piece of information had come to his knowledge, which, incredible though it might appear, seemed to bear upon her failure to turn up at the Ritz. He most earnestly begged that you should go round and see him at once—because if his information was correct any delay might prove most dangerous for her. And lastly, on no account were you to go to the police until you had seen him."

For a while there was silence in the room. Drummond, frowning heavily, was staring out of the window; the others, not knowing what to say, were waiting for him to speak. And after a while he swung round, and they saw that the air of indecision had gone.

"That simplifies matters considerably," he said quietly. "It reduces it to the old odds of Peterson and me."

"But you'll go to the police, old man," cried Algy. "You won't pay any attention to that message. He'll never know that you haven't come straight to him."

Drummond laughed shortly.

"Have you forgotten the rules so much, Algy, that you think that?

Look out of the window, man, only don't be seen. There's a fellow watching the house now—I couldn't go a yard without Peterson knowing. Moreover I'm open to a small bet that he knew I was in the house when he was talking to Ted. Good heavens! No. Peterson is not the sort of man to play those monkey tricks with. He's got Phyllis, the whole thing is his show. And if I went to the police, long before they could bring it home to him, or get her back—she'd be—why?—and once again the veins stood out on his forehead—"Lord knows what the swine wouldn't have done to her. It's just a barter at the present moment—the diamonds against her. And there's going to be no haggling. They win the first round—but there are a few more on the horizon."

"What are you going to do?" said Ted.

"Exactly what he suggests," answered Hugh. "Go round and see him at the Ritz, now, at once. I shan't take the diamonds with me, but there will be no worry over the exchange as far as I'm concerned. It's just like his dirty method of fighting to go for a girl," he finished savagely.

He crossed to the door and opened it. "In case I don't come back by six, the diamonds are in my sponge bag in the bathroom—and go straight to Scotland Yard. Tell Tam-tam the whole yarn."

At the Ritz he was shown into the sitting-room where the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor was busily working on Austrian famine accounts. He rose as Hugh entered, and his daughter, still knitting busily, gave him a charming girlish smile.

"Ah, my dear young friend," began Mr. Longmoor. "I see you've had my message."

"Yes," answered Hugh affably. "I was standing next door to the fellow you were talking to. But before we come to business, so to speak—I must really ask you not to send Snooks round again. I don't like him. Why, my dear Carl, I preferred our late lamented Henry Lakington."

There was a moment of dead silence, during which the Reverend Theodosius stared at him speechlessly and the busy knitter ceased to knit. The shock was so complete and sudden that even Carl Peterson seemed at a loss, and Drummond laughed gently as he took a chair.

"I'm tired of this dressing-up business, Carl," he remarked in the same affable voice. "And it's so stupid to go on pretending when everybody knows. So I thought we might as well have all the cards on the table. Make the game much easier."

The clergyman found his voice.

"Are you mad, sir?" he spluttered. "Are you insane? How dare you come into this room and insult me? I shall ring the bell, sir, and have you removed."

He strode across the room, and Drummond watched him calmly.

"I've just called one bluff this afternoon, Carl," he said lazily. "Now I'll call another. Go on, push the bell. Send for the police and say I've insulted you. Go and see dear old Tam-tam yourself: he'll be most awfully braced at meeting you."

The other's hand fell slowly to his side, and he looked at his daughter with a resigned expression in his face.

"Really, my dear, I think that the heat—or perhaps—"

He paused expressively, and Drummond laughed.

"You were always a good actor, Carl, but it is worth while. There are no witnesses here, and I'm rather pressed for time. Through a series of accidents you have become aware of the fact that I am the leader of the Black Gang. You can go and tell the police if you like—in fact, that horrible little man who came round to see me threatened to do so. But, if you do, I shall tell them who you are, and I shall also inform them of the secret history of the bomb. So that, though it will be awkward for me, Carl, it will be far more awkward for you and Mademoiselle Irma; and it will be positively unhealthy for Snooks. You take me so far, don't you? Up to date I have been dealing in certainties; now we come to contingencies. It strikes me that there are two doubtful points, old friend of my youth—just two. And those two points are the whereabouts respectively of my wife and your diamonds. Now, Carl, do we talk business or not?"

"My dear young man," said the other resignedly. "I intended to talk business with you when you arrived if you had given me a chance. But as you've done nothing but talk the most unmitigated drivel since you've come into the room I haven't had a chance. You appear obsessed with this absurd delusion that I am some person called Carl, and—But where are you going?"

Drummond paused at the door.

"I'm going straight to Scotland Yard. I shall tell Sir Bryan Johnstone the whole story from A to Z, at the same time handing him a little bag containing diamonds which has recently come into my possession."

"You admit you've got them," snapped the other, letting the mask drop for a moment.

"That's better, Carl—much better." Drummond came back into the room. "I admit I've got them—but they're in a place where you can never find them, and they will remain there until six o'clock tonight when they go straight to Scotland Yard—unless, Carl—unless my wife is returned to me absolutely unscathed and unharmed before that hour. It is five o'clock now."

"And if she is returned—what then?"

"You shall have the diamonds."

"There is just one point, Captain Drummond," remarked the clergyman mildly. "Supposing that I am able to persuade certain people to expedite the return of Mrs. Drummond in exchange for that little bag, where do you and I stand after the bargain is transacted? Do you still intend to tell the police of your extraordinary delusions with regard to me?"

"Not unless they should happen to become acquainted with the ridiculous hallucination that I am the leader of the Black Gang," answered Drummond. "That was for your ears alone, my little one, and as you know it already you won't get fat on it, will you? No, my intentions—since we are having a heart-to-heart talk—are as follows: Once the exchange is effected we will start quite fair and square—just like last time, Carl. It

doesn't pay you to go to the police: It doesn't pay me, so we'll have a single on our own. I am frightfully anxious to add you to my collection of specimens, and I can't believe you are burning with zeal to go. But we'll see, Carl, we'll see. Only—no more monkey tricks with my wife. Don't let there be any misunderstanding on that point."

The clergyman smiled benevolently. "How aptly you put things!" he murmured. "I accept your terms, and I shall look forward afterward to the single on our own that you speak about. And now—as to details. You must bear in mind that just as Mrs. Drummond is more valuable to you than diamonds, she is also somewhat larger. In other words, it will be obvious at once whether those whom I represent have kept their side of the bargain by producing your wife. It will not be obvious whether you have kept yours. The diamonds may or may not be in your pockets, and once you have your wife in your arms again the incentive to return the diamonds would be diminished. So I suggest, Captain Drummond, that you should bring the diamonds to me—here in this room, before six o'clock as a proof of good faith. You may keep them in your possession; all that I require is to see them. I will then engage on my side to produce Mrs. Drummond within a quarter of an hour."

For a moment Drummond hesitated, fearing a trick. And yet it was a perfectly reasonable request, as he admitted to himself. From their point of view it was quite true that

they could have no proof that he would keep his word, and once Phyllis was in the room there would be nothing to prevent the two of them quietly walking out through the door and telling the Reverend Theodosius to go to h—l.

"Nothing can very well happen at the Ritz, can it?" continued the clergyman suavely. "And you see, I am even trusting you to the extent that I do not actually ask you to hand over the diamonds until your wife comes. I have no guarantee that even then you will not get up and leave the room with them still in your possession. You are too big and strong a man, Captain Drummond, to allow of any horseplay—especially—in a clergyman's suite of rooms."

Drummond laughed. "Cut it out, Carl!" he exclaimed. "Cut it out, for heaven's sake! All right, I agree. I'll go round and get the stones now."

He rose and went to the door.

"But don't forget, Carl—if there are any monkey-tricks, heaven help you."

The door closed behind him, and with a snarl the clergyman spun round on the girl.

"How the devil has he spotted us?" His face was convulsed with rage. "He's the biggest fool in the world, and yet he spots me every time. However, there's no time to worry about that now; we must think."

He took one turn up and down the room, then he nodded his head as if he had come to a satisfactory decision. And when he spoke to the girl, who sat waiting expectantly on the sofa, he might have been the head

of a big business firm giving orders to his managers for the day.

"Ring up headquarters of A branch," he said quietly. "Tell them to send round No. 13 to this room at once. He must be here within a quarter of an hour."

"Number 13," repeated the girl, making a note. "That's the man who is such a wonderful mimic, isn't it? Well?"

"Number 10 and the Italian are to come with him, and they are to wait below for further orders."

"That all?" She rose to her feet as the Reverend Theodosius crossed rapidly to the door which led to the bathroom. "What about that silly little fool—his wife?"

For a moment the man paused, genuine amazement on his face.

"My dear girl, you don't really imagine I ever intended to produce her, do you? And any lingering doubt I might have had on the matter disappeared the moment I found Drummond knew us. There's going to be no mistake this time over that young gentleman, believe me."

With a slight laugh he disappeared into the bathroom, and as little Janet put through her call a tinkling of bottles seemed to show that the Reverend Theodosius was not wasting time.

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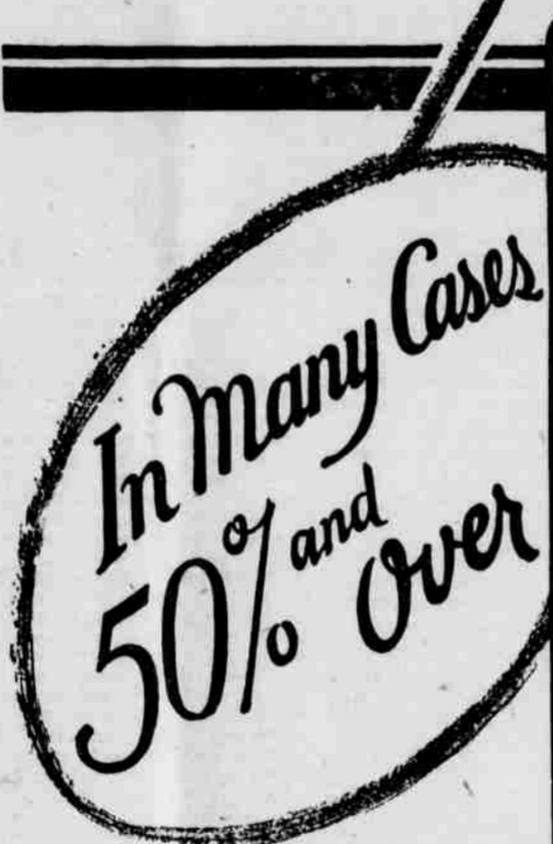
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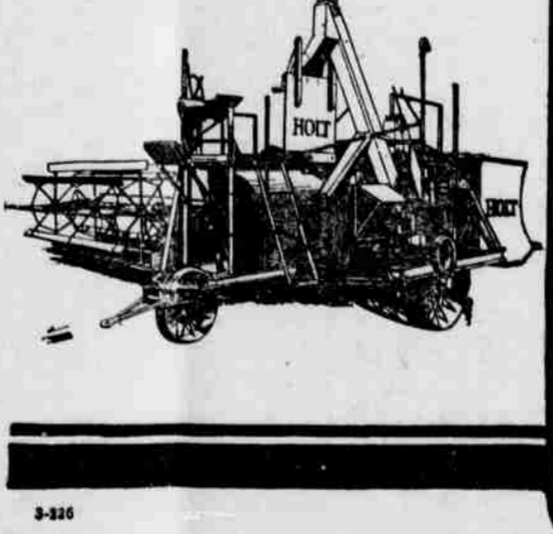
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