



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

BY CYRIL McNEILLE SAPPER
W.N.U. Service

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—To a gathering of anarchists in Haring, 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 disappearance. 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. Later, 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 an equivalent to Zadowa's agreeing not to divulge to the police the fact that Drummond is the leader of the Black Gang. Drummond, irritated by 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.—Mrs. Drummond disappears, and Hugh recognizes Peterson's hand. Peterson summons Drummond to his hotel. He goes, and they come to an understanding. Peterson stipulates that the diamonds must be returned to him before Mrs. Drummond is released. Hugh agrees to the terms, and leaves to bring the gems.

CHAPTER XI.—Returning with the stones, Drummond is drugged and placed in an auto, which Peterson plans to be driven into the Thames. Drummond's consequent death being made to appear the result of an accident.

CHAPTER XII

In Which Hugh Drummond Arrives at Maybrick Hall.

TWO things saved Drummond from what was practically certain death the heavy coat he was wearing and the fact that he rolled sideways clear of the steering wheel as soon as the man let go of him with his hand. Had he remained behind the wheel he must infallibly have gone to the bottom with the car, and at that point where the river narrowed to come through the piers of the bridge the water was over twenty feet deep. He had sufficient presence of mind to take a deep breath as the car shot downward; then he felt the water close over his head. And if before his struggles to move had been fierce—now that the end seemed at hand, they became desperate. He desired to get clear—to give or kick with his legs and come to the surface tumbled him to one superhuman effort. He felt as if the huge heave he gave with his legs against the floorboards must send him flying to the top; afterwards he realized that this vast effort had been purely mental—the actual physical result had been practically negligible. But not quite, it had done something, and the coat did the rest.

With that one last supreme throw for his life his mind had overcome the effect of the poison to the extent of forcing his legs to give one spasmodic little kick. He floated clear of the car, and slowly—how slowly only his bursting lungs could testify—the big coat brought him to the surface. For a moment or two he could do nothing save draw in deep gulps of air; then he realized that the danger was not yet past. For he couldn't shout, he could do nothing save float and drift, and the current had carried him clear of the bridge out of sight of those on top. And his mind was quite clear enough to realize that the coat which had saved him, once it became sodden would just as surely drown him.

He could see men with lanterns on the bridge; he could hear them shouting and talking. And then he saw a boat come back from the ship that had passed through just before he went over the edge in his car. Surely they'd pull down stream to look for him, he thought in an agony of futile anger; surely they couldn't be such fools as to go on pulling about just

"but you'll have to be content with the coat and hat. The body has doubtless drifted farther on and will be recovered later."

He took off his hat, and let it drift away; he unbuttoned his overcoat and sent it after the hat. Then letting himself down into the deep water, he swam noiselessly toward the bank.

A little to his surprise he found that his legs and arms felt perfectly normal—a trifle stiff, perhaps, but beyond that the effect of the poison seemed to have worn off completely. Beyond being very wet he appeared to have suffered no evil results at all, and after he'd done "knees up" on the bank for five minutes to restore his circulation he sat down to consider his plan of action.

"First, Phyllis at Maybrick hall. He must get at her somehow, and, even if he couldn't get her away, he must let her know that she would be all right. After that things must look after themselves; everything would depend on circumstances. Always provided that those circumstances led to the one great goal—Peterson. Once Phyllis was safe, everything was subservient to that.

A church clock near by began to toll the hour, and Drummond counted the strokes. Eleven o'clock—two hours since he had gone over the bridge—and it felt like six. So much had letters; it gave him so many more hours of darkness, and he wanted darkness for his explorations at Maybrick hall. And it suddenly dawned on him that he hadn't the faintest idea where the house was.

It might have deterred some men; it merely made Drummond laugh. If he didn't know, he'd find out—even if it became necessary to pull some one out of bed and ask. The first thing to do was to get back to the spot where the car had halted, and to do that he must go across country. Activity was diminishing on the bridge, but he could still see lanterns dancing about and the sudden appearance of a very wet man might lead to awkward questions. So he struck off in the direction he judged to be right—moving with the strange, cat-like silence which was a never-ceasing source of wonderment even to those who knew him best.

No man ever heard Drummond's coming, and very few ever saw him until it was too late, if he didn't intend that they should. And now, in utterly unknown country, with he knew not how many undesirable gentlemen about, he was taking no risks. Merely for him, it was a dark night—just such a night, in fact, as he would have chosen, and as he passed like a huge shadow from tree to tree, only to vanish silently behind a hedge, and reappear two hundred yards farther on, he began to feel that life was good. The joy of action was in his veins; he was going to get his hands on somebody soon, preferably the Italian or the man who called himself Franz. For Bill he had a sneaking regard; Bill, at any rate, could appreciate a good car when he saw one.

The only trouble was that he was unarmed, and an unarmed man can't afford to stop and admire the view in a mix-up. Not that the point deterred him for a moment, it only made him doubly cautious. He must see without being seen; he must act without being heard. Afterwards would be a different matter.

Suddenly he stiffened and crouched motionless behind a bush. He had heard voices and the sound of footsteps crunching on the gravel.

"No good waiting any more," said a man whom he recognized as Franz. "He's dead for a certainty, and they can't pull him out until tomorrow. Couldn't have gone better. He swayed right over just as the car took the gates, and the bridgekeeper saw it. Think he fainted—"

Their voices died out in the distance. Drummond came out from behind the bush. He stepped forward cautiously and found himself confronted by a high wire fence. Thru it he could see a road along which the two men must have been walking.

And then through a gap in the trees he saw a light in the window of a house. So his first difficulty was solved. The man called Franz and his companion could have but one destination in all probability—Maybrick hall. And that must be the house he could see through the trees, while the road on the other side of the fence was the drive leading up to it.

He gave them half a minute or so; then he climbed through the fence. It was a fence with horizontal strands of thick wire, about a foot apart, and the top strand was two feet above Drummond's head. An expensive fence, he reflected; an unusual fence to put round any property of such a sort. An admirable fence for cattle in a corral because of its strength, but for a house and grounds—peculiar, to say the least. It was not a thing of beauty; it afforded no concealment and it was perfectly simple to climb through. And because Drummond had been trained in the school which notices details, even apparently trivial ones, he stood for a moment or two staring at the fence, after he had clambered through. It was the expense of the thing more than anything else that puzzled him. It was new—that was obvious, and after a while he proceeded to walk along it for a short way. And another peculiar thing struck him when he came to the first upright. It was an iron T-shaped post, and each strand of wire passed through a hole in the bottom part of the T. A perfectly simple and sound arrangement and but for one little point just the type of upright one would have expected to find in such a fence. Round each hole was a small white collar through which each strand of wire passed, so that the wires rested on the collars and not on the holes in the iron upright. Truly a most remarkable fence, he reflected again—in fact, a thoroughly eccentric fence. But he got no farther than that in his thoughts; the knowledge which would have supplied him with the one clue necessary to account for the fence's eccentricity of appearance was not his. The facts he could notice; the reason for the facts were beyond him. And after a further examination he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. There were bigger things ahead of him than a mere question of fencing, and, keeping in the shadow of the shrubs which fringed each side of the drive, he crept silently toward the house.

It was a low, rambling type of

building covered as far as he could see with ivy and creepers. There were only two stories, and Hugh nodded his satisfaction. It made things simpler when outside work was more than likely. For a long time he stood carefully surveying every possible line of approach and flight, and it was while he was balancing up chances that he gradually became aware of a peculiar noise proceeding from the house. It sounded like the very faint hum of an airplane in the far distance, except that every two or three seconds there came a slight thud. It was quite regular, and during the four or five minutes whilst he stood there listening there was no variation in the monotonous rhythm. Thud; thud; thud—faint, but very distinct; and all the time the general whirring of some smooth-running, powerful engine.

The house was in darkness save for one room on the ground floor, from which the light was streaming. It was empty, and appeared to be an ordinary sitting room. And, as a last resort, Hugh decided he would go in that way, if outside methods failed. But to start with, he had no intention of entering the house; it struck him that the odds against him were unnecessarily large.

He retreated still farther into the shadow, and then quite clear and distinct the hoot of an owl was heard in the silent garden. He knew that Phyllis would recognize the call if she heard it; he knew that she would give him some sign if she could. And so hoping, and it was impossible to tell to whom the hoot belonged. It might be Phyllis, and on the other hand it might not. So once again he repeated, and then he waited for some answer.

It came almost at once; his own name called very gently, and he hesitated no more. He was across the lawn in a flash and standing under her window, and once again he heard her voice tense with anxiety. "Is that you, Hugh?"

"Yes, darling, it's me right enough," he whispered back. "But there's no time to talk now. I want you to jump onto the flower-bed. It's soft landing, and it won't hurt you."

"But I can't, old man," she said, with a little catch in her breath. "They've got me lashed up with a steel chain."

"All right, kid; if you can't come to me, I must come to you. We'll soon deal with that chain."

He glanced into the room underneath her, and saw that it looked like a drawing room. The windows seemed easy to force if necessary, but he decided first of all to try the ivy outside. But it was useless for a man of his weight. Just as he bottom it started him, but as soon as he started to climb it gave way at once. Twice he got up about six feet, twice he fell back again, as the ivy broke away from the wall. And after the second attempt he looked up at the anxious face of his wife above.

"No go, darling," he muttered. "And I'm afraid of making too much noise. I'm going to try and force this window."

By a stroke of luck they had not taken his clasp-knife, and by a still greater stroke of luck he found that the catch on the window had been broken, and that it proved even easier to open than he had thought.

The next moment he had vanished into the drawing room. And now he noticed that the strange noise which he had heard while standing on the lawn was much louder. As he cautiously opened the door and peered into the passage the very faint hum became a steady drone, while with each successive thud the floor-boards shook a little.

The passage was in darkness, the light was shining from under some of the doors. As he crept along in search of the stairs he heard voices proceeding from one of the rooms he passed. Evidently a fairly populous household, it struck him as he tested the bottom stair with his weight to see if it creaked. But the staircase was old and solid, and the stair carpet was thick, and at the moment Hugh was not disposed to linger. Afterward the house seemed to promise a fairly fruitful field for investigation; at present Phyllis was all that mattered. So he vanished upwards with the uncanny certainty of all his movements at night, and a moment later he was standing on the landing above.

It was a long, straight corridor, a replica of the one below, and he turned in the direction in which he knew her room must lie. And he had only taken a couple of steps when he stopped abruptly, peering ahead with eyes that strove to pierce the darkness. For it seemed to him that there was something in the passage—something darker than its surroundings. And at that moment something sprang out of the darkness and he found himself fighting for his life.

For a second or two he was at a disadvantage, so completely had he been taken by surprise; then the old habits returned. And not a moment too soon; he was up against an antagonist who was worthy of him. Two hands like iron hooks were round his neck, and the man who gets that grip first wins more often than not. His own hands shot out into the darkness, and then for the first time in his life he felt a stab of fear. For he couldn't reach the other man; long though his arms were, the other man's were far longer, and as his hands went along them he could feel the muscles standing out like steel bars. He made one supreme effort to force through to his opponents throat, and it failed; with his superior reach he could keep his distance. Already Drummond's head was beginning to feel like bursting with the awful pressure round his throat, and he knew he must do something at once or lose. And just in time he remembered his clasp-knife. It was against his grain to

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