

The Bat

by

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The Shadow Of The Bat

"You've got to get him, boys - get him or bust!" said a tired police chief, pounding a heavy fist on a table. The detectives he bellowed the words at looked at the floor. They had done their best and failed. Failure meant "resignation" for the police chief, return to the hated work of pounding the pavements for them - they knew it, and, knowing it, could summon no gesture of bravado to answer their chief's. Gunmen, thugs, hi-jackers, loft-robbers, murderers, they could get them all in time - but they could not get the man he wanted.

"Get him - to hell with expense - I'll give you carte blanche - but get him!" said a haggard millionaire in the sedate inner offices of the best private detective firm in the country. The man on the other side of the desk, man hunter extraordinary, old servant of Government and State, sleuthhound without a peer, threw up his hands in a gesture of odd hopelessness. "It isn't the money, Mr. De Courcy - I'd give every cent I've made to get the man you want - but I can't promise you results - for the first time in my life." The conversation was ended.

"Get him? Huh! I'll get him, watch my smoke!" It was young ambition speaking in a certain set of rooms in Washington. Three days later young ambition lay in a New York gutter with a bullet in his heart and a look of such horror and surprise on his dead face that even the ambulance-Doctor who found him felt shaken. "We've lost the most promising man I've had in ten years," said his chief when the news came in. He swore helplessly, "Damn the luck!"

"Get him - get him - get him - get him!" From a thousand sources now the clamor arose - press, police, and public alike crying out for the capture of the master criminal of a century - lost voices hounding a specter down the alleyways of the wind. And still the meshes broke and the quarry slipped away before the hounds were well on the scent - leaving behind a trail of shattered safes and rifled jewel cases - while ever the clamor rose higher to "Get him - get him - get - "

Get whom, in God's name - get what? Beast, man, or devil? A specter - a flying shadow - the shadow of a Bat.

>From thieves' hangout to thieves' hangout the word passed along stirring the underworld like the passage of an electric spark. "There's a bigger guy than Pete Flynn shooting the works, a guy that could have Jim Gunderson for breakfast and not notice he'd et." The underworld heard and waited to be shown; after a little while the underworld began to whisper to itself in tones of awed respect. There were bright stars and flashing comets in the sky of the world of crime - but this new planet rose with the portent of an evil moon.

The Bat - they Called him the Bat. Like a bat he chose the night hours for his work of rapine; like a bat he struck and vanished, pouncingly, noiselessly; like a bat he never showed himself to the face of the day. He'd never been in stir, the bulls had never mugged him, he didn't run with a mob, he played a lone hand, and fenced his stuff so that

even the Fence couldn't swear he knew his face. Most lone wolves had a moll at any rate - women were their ruin - but if the Bat had a moll, not even the grapevine telegraph could locate her.

Rat-faced gunmen in the dingy back rooms of saloons muttered over his exploits with bated breath. In tawdrily gorgeous apartments, where gathered the larger figures, the proconsuls of the world of crime, cold, conscienceless brains dissected the work of a colder and swifter brain than theirs, with suave and bitter envy. Evil's Four Hundred chattered, discussed, debated - sent out a thousand invisible tentacles to clutch at a shadow - to turn this shadow and its distorted genius to their own ends. The tentacles recoiled, baffled - the Bat worked alone - not even Evil's Four Hundred could bend him into a willing instrument to execute another's plan.

The men higher up waited. They had dealt with lone wolves before and broken them. Some day the Bat would slip and falter; then they would have him. But the weeks passed into months and still the Bat flew free, solitary, untamed, and deadly. At last even his own kind turned upon him; the underworld is like the upper in its fear and distrust of genius that flies alone. But when they turned against him, they turned against a spook - a shadow. A cold and bodiless laughter from a pit of darkness answered and mocked at their bungling gestures of hate - and went on, flouting Law and Lawless alike.

Where official trailer and private sleuth had failed, the newspapers might succeed - or so thought the disillusioned young men of the Fourth Estate - the tireless foxes, nose-down on the trail of news - the trackers, who never gave up until that news was run to earth. Star reporter, leg-man, cub, veteran gray in the trade - one and all they tried to pin the Bat like a caught butterfly to the front page of their respective journals - soon or late each gave up, beaten. He was news - bigger news each week - a thousand ticking typewriters clicked his adventures - the brief, staccato recital of his career in the morgues of the great dailies grew longer and more incredible each day. But the big news - the scoop of the century - the yearned-for headline, "Bat Nabbed Red-Handed", "Bat Slain in Gun Duel with Police" - still eluded the ravenous maw of the Linotypes. And meanwhile, the red-scored list of his felonies lengthened and the rewards offered from various sources for any clue which might lead to his apprehension mounted and mounted till they totaled a small fortune.

Columnists took him up, played with the name and the terror, used the name and the terror as a starting point from which to exhibit their own particular opinions on everything and anything. Ministers mentioned him in sermons; cranks wrote fanatic letters denouncing him as one of the even-headed beasts of the Apocalypse and a forerunner of the end of the world; a popular revue put on a special Bat number wherein eighteen beautiful chorus girls appeared masked and black-winged in costumes of Brazilian bat fur; there were Bat club sandwiches, Bat cigarettes, and a new shade of hosiery called simply and succinctly Bat. He became a fad - a catchword - a national figure. And yet - he was walking Death - cold - remorseless. But Death itself had become a toy of publicity in these days of limelight and jazz.

A city editor, at lunch with a colleague, pulled at his cigarette and talked. "See that Sunday story we had on the Bat?" he asked. "Pretty tidy - huh - and yet we didn't have to play it up. It's an amazing list - the Marshall jewels - the Allison murder - the mail truck thing - two hundred thousand he got out of that, all negotiable, and two men dead. I wonder how many people he's really killed. We made it six murders and nearly a million in loot - didn't even have room for the small stuff - but there must be more - "

His companion whistled.

"And when is the Universe's Finest Newspaper going to burst forth with "Bat Captured by BLADE Reporter?" he queried sardonically.

"Oh, for - lay off it, will you?" said the city editor peevishly. "The Old Man's been hopping around about it for two months till everybody's plumb cuckoo. Even offered a bonus - a big one - and that shows how crazy he is - he doesn't love a nickel any better than his right eye - for any sort of exclusive story. Bonus - huh!" and he crushed out his cigarette. "It won't be a Blade reporter that gets that bonus - or any reporter. It'll be Sherlock Holmes from the spirit world!"

"Well - can't you dig up a Sherlock?"

The editor spread out his hands. "Now, look here," he said. "We've got the best staff of any paper in the country, if I do say it. We've got boys that could get a personal signed story from Delilah on how she barbered Samson - and find out who struck Billy Patterson and who was the Man in the Iron Mask. But the Bat's something else again. Oh, of course, we've panned the police for not getting him; that's always the game. But, personally, I won't pan them; they've done their damndest. They're up against something new. Scotland Yard wouldn't do any better - or any other bunch of cops that I know about."

"But look here, Bill, you don't mean to tell me he'll keep on getting away with it indefinitely?"

The editor frowned. "Confidentially - I- don't know," he said with a chuckle: "The situation's this: for the first time the super-crook - the super-crook of fiction - the kind that never makes a mistake - has come to life - real life. And it'll take a cleverer man than any Central Office dick I've ever met to catch him!"

"Then you don't think he's just an ordinary crook with a lot of luck?"

"I do not." The editor was emphatic. "He's much brainier. Got a ghastly sense of humor, too. Look at the way he leaves his calling card after every job - a black paper bat inside the Marshall safe - a bat drawn on the wall with a burnt match where he'd jimmied the Cedarburg Bank - a real bat, dead, tacked to the mantelpiece over poor old Allison's body. Oh, he's in a class by himself - and I very much doubt if he was a crook at all for most of his life."

"You mean?"

"I mean this. The police have been combing the underworld for him; I don't think he comes from there. I think they've got to look higher, up in our world, for a brilliant man with a kink in the brain. He may be a Doctor, a lawyer, a merchant, honored in his community by day - good line that, I'll use it some time - and at night, a bloodthirsty assassin. - Deacon Brodie - ever hear of him - the Scotch deacon that burgled his parishioners' houses on the quiet? Well - that's our man."

"But my Lord, Bill - "

"I know. I've been going around the last month, looking at everybody I knew and thinking - are you the Bat? Try it for a while. You'll want to sleep with a light in your room after a few days of it. Look around the University Club - that white-haired man over there - dignified - respectable - is he the Bat? Your own lawyer - your own Doctor - your own best friend. Can happen you know - look at those Chicago boys - the thrill-killers. Just brilliant students - likeable boys - to the people that taught them - and cold-blooded murderers all the same.

"Bill! You're giving me the shivers!"

"Am I?" The editor laughed grimly. "Think it over. No, it isn't so pleasant. - But that's my theory - and I swear I think I'm right." He rose.

His companion laughed uncertainly.

"How about you, Bill - are you the Bat?"

The editor smiled. "See," he said, "it's got you already. No, I can prove an alibi. The Bat's been laying off the city recently - taking a fling at some of the swell suburbs. Besides I haven't the brains - I'm free to admit it." He struggled into his coat. "Well, let's talk about something else. I'm sick of the Bat and his murders."

His companion rose as well, but it was evident that the editor's theory had taken firm hold on his mind. As they went out the door together he recurred to the subject.

"Honestly, though, Bill - were you serious, really serious - when you said you didn't know of a single detective with brains enough to trap this devil?"

The editor paused in the doorway. "Serious enough," he said. "And yet there's one man - I don't know him myself but from what I've heard of him, he might be able - but what's the use of speculating?"

"I'd like to know all the same," insisted the other, and laughed nervously. "We're moving out to the country next week ourselves - right in the Bat's new territory."

"We-el," said the editor, "you won't let it go any further? Of course it's just an idea of mine, but if the Bat ever came prowling around our place, the detective I'd try to get in touch with would be - " He put his lips close to his companion's ear and whispered a name.

The man whose name he whispered, oddly enough, was at that moment standing before his official superior in a quiet room not very far away. Tall, reticently good-looking and well, if inconspicuously, clothed and groomed, he by no means seemed the typical detective that the editor had spoken of so scornfully. He looked something like a college athlete who had kept up his training, something like a pillar of one of the more sedate financial houses. He could assume and discard a dozen manners in as many minutes, but, to the casual observer, the one thing certain about him would probably seem his utter lack of connection with the seamier side of existence. The key to his real secret of life, however, lay in his eyes. When in repose, as now, they were veiled and without unusual quality - but they were the eyes of a man who can wait and a man who can strike.

He stood perfectly easy before his chief for several moments before the latter looked up from his papers.

"Well, Anderson," he said at last, looking up, "I got your report on the Wilhenry burglary this morning. I'll tell you this about it - if you do a neater and quicker job in the next ten years, you can take this desk away from me. I'll give it to you. As it is, your name's gone up for promotion today; you deserved it long ago."

"Thank you, sir," replied the tall man quietly, "but I had luck with that case."

"Of course you had luck," said the chief. "Sit down, won't you, and have a cigar - if you can stand my brand. Of course you had luck, Anderson, but that isn't the point. It takes a man with brains to use a piece of luck as you used it. I've waited a long time here for a man with your sort of brains and, by Judas, for a while I thought they were all as dead as Pinkerton. But now I know there's one of them alive at any rate - and it's a hell of a relief."

"Thank you, sir," said the tall man, smiling and sitting down. He took a cigar and lit it. "That makes it easier, sir - your telling me that. Because - I've come to ask a favor."

"All right," responded the chief promptly. "Whatever it is, it's granted."

Anderson smiled again. "You'd better hear what it is first, sir. I don't want to put anything over on you."

"Try it!" said the chief. "What is it - vacation? Take as long as you like - within reason - you've earned it - I'll put it through today."

Anderson shook his head, "No sir - I don't want a vacation."

"Well," said the chief impatiently. "Promotion? I've told you about that. Expense money for anything - fill out a voucher and I'll O.K. it - be best man at your wedding - by Judas, I'll even do that!"

Anderson laughed. "No, sir - I'm not getting married and - I'm pleased about the promotion, of course - but it's not that. I want to be assigned to a certain case - that's all."

The chief's look grew searching. "H'm," he said. "Well, as I say, anything within reason. What case do you want to be assigned to?"

The muscles of Anderson's left hand tensed on the arm of his chair. He looked squarely at the chief. "I want a chance at the Bat!" he replied slowly.

The chief's face became expressionless. "I said - anything within reason," he responded softly, regarding Anderson keenly.

"I want a chance at the Bat!" repeated Anderson stubbornly. "If I've done good work so far - I want a chance at the Bat!"

The chief drummed on the desk. Annoyance and surprise were in his voice when he spoke.

"But look here, Anderson," he burst out finally. "Anything else and I'll - but what's the use? I said a minute ago, you had brains - but now, by Judas, I doubt it! If anyone else wanted a chance at the Bat, I'd give it to them and gladly - I'm hard-boiled. But you're too valuable a man to be thrown away!"

"I'm no more valuable than Wentworth would have been."

"Maybe not - and look what happened to him! A bullet hole in his heart - and thirty years of work that he might have done thrown away! No, Anderson, I've found two first-class men since I've been at this desk - Wentworth and you. He asked for his chance; I gave it to him - turned him over to the Government - and lost him. Good detectives aren't so plentiful that I can afford to lose you both."

"Wentworth was a friend of mine," said Anderson softly. His knuckles were white dints in the hand that gripped the chair. "Ever since the Bat got him I've wanted my chance. Now my other work's cleaned up - and I still want it."

"But I tell you - " began the chief in tones of high exasperation. Then he stopped and looked at his protege. There was a silence for a time.

"Oh, well - " said the chief finally in a hopeless voice. "Go ahead - commit suicide - I'll send you a 'Gates Ajar' and a card, 'Here lies a damn fool who would have been a great detective if he hadn't been so pig-headed.' Go ahead!"

Anderson rose. "Thank you, sir," he said in a deep voice. His eyes had light in them now. "I can't thank you enough, sir."

"Don't try," grumbled the chief. "If I weren't as much of a damn fool as you are I wouldn't let you do it. And if I weren't so damn old, I'd go after the slippery devil myself and let you sit here and watch me get brought in with an infernal paper bat pinned where my shield ought to be. The Bat's supernatural, Anderson. You haven't a chance in the world but it does me good all the same to shake hands with a man with brains and nerve," and he solemnly wrung Anderson's hand in an iron grip.

Anderson smiled. "The cagiest bat flies once too often," he said. "I'm not promising anything, chief, but - "

"Maybe," said the chief. "Now wait a minute, keep your shirt on, you're not going out bat hunting this minute, you know - "

"Sir? I thought I - "

"Well, you're not," said the chief decidedly. "I've still some little respect for my own intelligence and it tells me to get all the work out of you I can, before you start wild-goose chasing after this - this bat out of hell. The first time he's heard of again - and it shouldn't be long from the fast way he works - you're assigned to the case. That's understood. Till then, you do what I tell you - and it'll be work, believe me!"

"All right, sir," Anderson laughed and turned to the door. "And - thank you again."

He went out. The door closed. The chief remained for some minutes looking at the door and shaking his head. "The best man I've had in years - except Wentworth," he murmured to himself. "And throwing himself away - to be killed by a cold-blooded devil that nothing human can catch - you're getting old, John Grogan - but, by Judas, you can't blame him, can you? If you were a man in the prime like him, by Judas, you'd be doing it yourself. And yet it'll go hard - losing him - "

He turned back to his desk and his papers. But for some minutes he could not pay attention to the papers. There was a shadow on them - a shadow that blurred the typed letters - the shadow of bat's wings.

The Indomitable Miss Van Gorder

Miss Cornelis Van Gorder, indomitable spinster, last bearer of a name which had been great in New York when New York was a red-roofed Nieuw Amsterdam and Peter Stuyvesant a parvenu, sat propped up in bed in the green room of her newly rented country house reading the morning newspaper. Thus seen, with an old soft Paisley shawl tucked in about her thin shoulders and without the stately gray transformation that adorned her on less intimate occasions, - she looked much less formidable and more innocently placid than those could ever have imagined who had only felt the bite of her tart wit at such functions as the state Van Gorder dinners. Patrician to her finger tips, independent to the roots of her hair, she preserved, at sixty-five, a humorous and quenchless curiosity in regard to every side of life, which even the full and crowded years that already lay behind her had not entirely satisfied. She was an Age and an Attitude, but she was more than that; she had grown old without growing dull or losing touch with youth - her face had the delicate strength of a fine cameo and her mild and youthful heart preserved an innocent zest for adventure.

Wide travel, social leadership, the world of art and books, a dozen charities, an existence rich with diverse experience - all these she had enjoyed energetically and to the full - but she felt, with ingenious vanity, that there were still sides to her character which even these had not brought to light. As a little girl she had hesitated between wishing to be a locomotive engineer or a famous bandit - and when she had found, at seven, that the accident of sex would probably debar her from either occupation, she had resolved fiercely that some time before she died she would show the world in general and the Van Gorder clan in particular that a woman was quite as capable of dangerous exploits as a man. So far her life, while exciting enough at moments, had never actually been dangerous and time was slipping away without giving her an opportunity to prove her hardness of heart. Whenever she thought of this the fact annoyed her extremely - and she thought of it now.

She threw down the morning paper disgustedly. Here she was at 65 - rich, safe, settled for the summer in a delightful country place with a good cook, excellent servants, beautiful gardens and grounds - everything as respectable and comfortable as - as a limousine! And out in the world people were murdering and robbing each other, floating over Niagara Falls in barrels, rescuing children from burning houses, taming tigers, going to Africa to hunt gorillas, doing all sorts of exciting things! She could not float over Niagara Falls in a barrel; Lizzie Allen, her faithful old maid, would never let her! She could not go to Africa to hunt gorillas; Sally Ogden, her sister, would never let her hear the last of it. She could not even, as she certainly would if she were a man, try and track down this terrible creature, the Bat!

She sniffed disgruntledly. Things came to her much too easily. Take this very house she was living in. Ten days ago she had decided on the spur of the moment - a decision suddenly crystallized by a weariness of charitable committees and the noise and heat of New York - to take a place in the country for the summer. It was late in the renting season - even the ordinary difficulties of finding a suitable spot would have added some

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