



GUNMAN'S BLUFF

Edgar Wallace
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THIRD INSTALMENT
SYNOPSIS—Margaret Lefere's brother, Rex, has been found dead with a note addressed to his sister stating that he has been ruined by investments recommended by Luke Maddison, wealthy banker to whom Margaret is engaged. Danty Morrell, a rather shady character, informs Maddison that Rex had cashed a check for 18,000 pounds bearing Luke's signature. Detective Bird, known as "The Sparrow," calls on Maddison, who refuses to take any action although his signature was forged to the check. Maddison does not know of the dead man's accusation of him, Margaret does not know that her brother was a forger. Her love for Maddison turns to hate, but she decides to keep her promise to marry him. She is desperately poor and Maddison makes over his entire fortune to her, everything he possesses. In the background of these events is the figure, still shadowy, of Gunner Haynes, a famous American crook, who had en-

lighted the train disappear into the darkness, and went home humming a little song, for Mr. and Mrs. Luke Maddison were not among the passengers.

Luke did not even trouble to see Margaret at once. Before lunch he remembered and telephoned.

"I want to see you, darling," he began.

"Why?" It was difficult to disguise the suspicion she felt.

"I want you to sign a little document," he said gaily.

So that was it! Danty had warned her. Only she had never dreamed that she would be asked to renounce her marriage portion so soon.

"Wife! It's wonderful—unbelievable!"

"A document?"

"I want you to transfer some money to me," he said. "It is the merest formality—I've discovered that I have rather less than I need."

She thought quickly.

"Very well, come to the house at three o'clock."

He forgot that the bank closed at three-thirty and agreed. After all, it did not greatly matter if the check was returned. It was merely a transference from his personal account to the bank's.

He was, true to his methods, five minutes late, when he was shown into her little sitting room. The first thing that struck him was that she was dressed. He had pictured her resting in her negligee—in bed even. She was not as pale as she had been. It was when he went to take her in his arms that he had his first real shock.

"Don't kiss me—please!"

It was not a request; it was a peremptory command.

"Why—what is wrong, darling?"

She shook her head irritably.

"Please tell me what you want."

Her tone turned him cold. It was hard, almost antagonistic. He could hardly believe the evidence of his senses.

Stammering like a schoolboy, he told her in disjointed sentences of the situation which had arisen, and she listened and did not speak until he stopped.

"Ninety-seven thousand pounds," she said. "A tenth of that would have saved Rex."

He could only stare at him uncomprehendingly.

"It was rather dreadful to see a man make a god of money, Luke, and to know that for its sake he is willing to sacrifice even a young life."

To him her voice sounded like the clasp of a bell; to herself it hardly seemed that it was she who was speaking.

"And to accuse this poor dead boy of forgery—to add that infamy to the other!"

"I—you are speaking of me?" he said in a whisper.

She nodded.

"Of you, I knew that you were coming to get your money back—that is why I did not go with you to France. I wanted it to happen here. Here, where I have friends and can meet you on even terms."

A pause, and then:

"Luke, I am giving you no money. You gave it to me—it is mine. Not a penny can you have—not a penny."

She wished he would speak during the silence that followed. She wished he would rave, curse her, do all the things that were consistent with her picture of him. But he said nothing. He was not even looking at her, but was studying the pattern of the carpet. Presently he jerked up his head.

"Good-bye," he said, and turned on his heel.

She heard the door close on him, and then there came to her a realization that made her brain reel. She loved him.

Why he gravitated to the Embankment he could never tell; it seemed a natural objective. He had no thought of suicide, no intention of finding that gross way to forgetfulness. Walking slowly by the parapet, he came to a halt before Scotland Yard, and eyed that Gothic building incuriously. That big detective was there, the Sparrow—the Sparrow, who righted so many wrongs, could he not right this one? The problem which denuded the mind of Luke Maddison. The children of the poor! He smiled mirthlessly. He was one of the children of the poor, the natural charge of that big man. To protect the children of the poor and punish the wrongdoer. Who had done wrong? Margaret. He tried hard to apportion all blame to her, to hate her. He shook his head and walked slowly back toward Blackfriars.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



With a shudder, she felt the ring slip upon her finger

countered Maddison and Margaret, apparently by chance, the evening before Rex's death.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

She stood there, her hands gripped her breast coming quickly and more quickly, and heard him override the protests which came from the other end of the wire. Presently he hung up the phone and turned to her a smile of triumph on his flushed face.

"You see Maddison?" he said grandly. "Look, stock and barrel, darling—I am what old Bird calls a child of the poor."

Even she could not realize that he was speaking prophetically.

"Do you want to see a man named Lewing?" Stiles asked Maddison.

"Lewing? Who is he?"

From Mr. Stiles' expression of dismanagement he gathered that Lewing was not of any great account.

"Show him in."

The man who followed Stiles into the room was tall and spare of build. His deep set eyes had in them a firmness that was almost animal. He glanced quickly around the room, and it almost seemed to Luke that he was reading every article within view against the night when he might enter and take away such movables as would show him a profit.

"Where is he?"

He held his head downwards, his sideways, looking up from under his heavy and unkindly eyebrows.

"Like to speak to you private, sir," he said in his husky voice.

Luke glanced at the manager and signalled him to leave the room. Mr. Stiles left with the greatest reluctance.

"Sit down, will you?"

Not taking his eyes from Luke's face, the visitor stretched out a hand and drew a chair to him.

"Well?"

The visitor sat down.

"Gunner?"

"Gunner?" he said in a low, hoarse voice. "The Sparrow spoke up for him, but the hawk handed out the three moor. The Gunner's appeal to the sessions."

Luke nodded.

"He has got three months' hard labor and is appealing. I hope he gets off. Did he send you to me?"

Lewing nodded slowly. He had the appearance of a man who was lying and expected to be found out at any moment.

"Yes. A few quid would do him a bit of good. He wants a mouthpiece. The Sparrow says he'll get off—an the Sparrow knows."

"Who is the Sparrow?"

A slow smile dawned on Mr. Lewing's face.

"He's a busy—a detective. Bird by name."

Luke nodded. He remembered Mr. Sparrow, whose activities were apparently not wholly confined to inquiries.

"I was inside myself—for breakin' an' enterin'," confided Lewing, "but they couldn't prove nothin' so I got out. But me an' the Gunner's like brothers. He was in the next cell to me at Brixon an' he told me to pop up an' have a talk with you—a few quid would help him."

Luke was puzzled. His acquaintance with the redoubtable gunman who called himself Haynes was a slight one, but it had struck him, during their brief interview in the Carlton, that the Gunner had the manners and certainly the vocabulary of a gentleman, and that this mean sneak-thief who was looking at him stealthily from the other side of the table was hardly the type of man in whom the Gunner would confide

his returns.

"Here is ten pounds. Give that to your friend. I can't help him much more. I'd like to know what happens to him, and he can write to me here."

At two o'clock Margaret Lafere stepped from her car at the door of the Marglebone registrar's office and Luke, waiting in the room at that official, turned to greet the palest bride that had ever entered those commonplace portals.

She spoke not at all, only answering the questions that were put to her. With a shudder she felt the ring slip upon her finger.

It was all over so quickly that she could not believe that the first act of her vengeance was played. Somebody put a pen into her hand, and a squat forefinger showed her the place where she must sign her name. For a long time she held the pen, and when she wrote it wavered in her fingers and the scrawled signature looked like nothing she had ever seen.

Leaving for Paris that night—the Meurice, or was it the Bristol? There was some confusion in her mind about these details; anyway, they did not matter if she kept her courage. The two o'clock wedding had been an inspiration. She went back to her house—Luke was coming to dinner; they were to leave immediately after to catch the night boat to Southampton.

Lewing's voice was tremulous. They were alone in her pretty little drawing room and he was sitting by her side, his arm around her. She was very still and unyielding, but he thought that he understood this.

Luke was bubbling over with excitement—he was like a boy who had received a new and wonderful present.

"I say, did you see that queer-looking man standing on the pavement as we came out? A fellow named Lewing—a thief of some kind. I wonder if he came to nick pockets? I'll bet he did; touched his hat to me as I came out."

She was not listening, and after he had gone, could remember nothing that he had said except something about Rex. It was indelible to him to mention the boy. Danty rang her up, but she would not see or receive him. She must go through now without help. Luke was coming at seven. At six she called him on the telephone, and had one panicky moment when she feared that he had already left his flat and could not be found. Then she heard his voice.

"Darling, isn't it odd? I can't believe it—I still think of myself as a crusty old bachelor."

Luke, I want you to do something for me. She found her voice at last. "No—no—don't interrupt. It's a big thing. I don't want to go away tonight, not for a day or two. I want to be alone, not to see you. My nerves are in a terrible state; I think I am on the verge of a breakdown."

As she went on, he listened with a growing sense of alarm and dismay. And yet he was not thinking of himself.

"I've been a selfish brute. Of course, darling, I quite understand. The conversation did not occupy five minutes of time; he could hardly realize what was happening, to what he was agreeing, before he was sitting at his writing table staring blankly at the telegraph forms by which he was to cancel so many pleasant arrangements.

Danty, waiting at Waterloo Station with a full view of the barrier, watched the mail-boat passengers filter through to the platform. He saw the barrier close and the red tail

lights of the train disappear into the darkness, and went home humming a little song, for Mr. and Mrs. Luke Maddison were not among the passengers.

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CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE WEATHER

Weather report for the week ending February 11, 1930, as compiled by Co-operative Station, Appalachian State Teachers College, Boone, J. T. C. Wright, observer:

Average maximum temperature 35 degrees.

Average minimum temperature, 18 degrees.

Average temperature, 27 degrees.

Average daily range in temperature, 15 degrees.

Greatest daily range in temperature, 23 degrees; date, 31st.

Average temperature at 8 a. m. (time of observation), 27 degrees.

Highest temperature reached, 45 degrees; date, 28th.

Lowest temperature reached, 7 degrees; date, 31st.

Number inches of rainfall (including melted snow), 1.07.

Number inches of snowfall, 10.

Greatest rainfall in 24 hours, .47 inches; date, 30th.

Number days with .01 inch or more rainfall, 3.

Number of cloudy days, 2.

Number of partly cloudy days, 2.

Direction of prevailing wind, east.

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