

GUNMAN'S BLUFF

By *Edgar Wallace*
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SECOND INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS

Margaret Leferre, engaged to marry Luke Maddison, wealthy banker, is with him when he encounters Gunner Haynes, an American crook, apparently by accident, in a London hotel lobby. Danton Morell, a friend of Margaret's brother Rex, is watching them, and wonders whether the Gunner recognizes him after seven years. That night Rex is found dead with a revolver by his side and a note addressed to his sister saying that he has been ruined by taking Luke Maddison's advice. Morell tells Maddison later that Rex cashed a check for Eighteen Thousand Pounds, ostensibly signed by Maddison.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"My name was forged to it. I did not give Rex a check for that amount. I have been making inquiries. I find that he was heavily involved in a derelict West African gold-mining syndicate, most of the shares of which you bought for a song less than a year ago. He has been buying these shares on margin and they have been steadily dropping in value. On the day he paid you eighteen thousand five hundred pounds there came another demand for a larger amount."

Danty's heart sank though he gave no visible evidence of his perturbation. This man knew more than he had dreamed could be known. Here was a crisis in Mr. Morell's affairs which might easily lead him to ruin and undo all those fine schemes of his.

"I do not exactly know what you are suggesting," he said. "My interest in the company is a very slight one, and I was horrified when I learned that Rex had been gambling in the shares. I give you the fullest permission to make any investigation you wish."

Luke opened the drawer of his desk and took out a check. From where he sat Danty thought the signature was a tolerably good forgery. He had thought so when Rex had brought the check to him. It is the simplest thing in the world to forge a name, an so far as he had been able to judge there were no flaws in Rex Leferre's essay in that dangerous game.

"You realize what is wrong with this check?" asked Luke.

The other shook his head.

"Are you suggesting that I knew the check was forged?" he asked.

Before he could reply there was a tap at the door and Luke looked up angrily.

"Come in," he said.

It was the apologetic manager.

"I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Maddison, but will you see Mr. Bird of Scotland yard?"

In spite of his self-possession Danty half rose from his seat. The Sparrow was the last man in the world he wanted to meet that morning.

Luke thought for a minute.

"Just a moment."

He rose and opened a door leading to the corridor.

"I shall want to see you again about this check, Mr. Morell," he said.

"Why not see me now?"

It was a challenge, but Luke Maddison could sense its insincerity.

"Mr. Bird has come to see me on quite another matter," he said. "In due course we will interview him together."

He closed the door on his visitor as the Sparrow was shown in through the other door. Mr. Bird came heavily into the room and favored every corner with a long scrutiny.

"Havin' a visitor, Mr. Maddison? I thought I saw somebody come in whilst I was waiting in the street outside?"

Luke nodded curtly.

"Mr. Danton Morell," he said. "Do you know him?"

The Sparrow smiled.

"As one knows the Lord Mayor—"

from a distance. I'm humble. You never find me hargin' in on society. I've had one dress suit seventeen years an' wear it twice a year—once for the police dinner and once to give the moths a cold."

"Do you know anything about him?"

The Sparrow's wide smile grew wider.

"His name and address—an' that's as much as any policeman wants to know about anybody. Bad business, this young Leferre case, Mr. Maddison. You din't want to appear in it, I suppose?"

Luke looked at him, startled.

"I? How on earth do I come into it?"

Mr. Bird coughed.

"Well, you do and you don't," he said. I happened to search the body an' the room. I found three loose checks on the Northern & Southern Bank—that's where you keep your private account, ain't it? An' this—"

Very leisurely he took out a fat and worn leather case from his pocket, laid it flat on the desk and rummaged in the inside. After a while he found what he was looking for—two folded sheets of paper, evidently torn from a school exercise book. He smoothed these flat and Luke saw a succession of signatures, one under the other; "Luke Maddison—Luke Maddison."

"Looks almost as though you'd been scribblin' absent mindedly." The detective's shrewd eyes were on the

classes, Mr. Maddison," he said. "No wonder Gunner Haynes thinks you're a good fellow—six months he got yesterday for bein' a suspected person. What a man! When I tried to pump hi' about your friend he wouldn't let on that he knew you even."

"Morell?" Luke was thrown off his guard, as he saw by the Sparrow's grin.

"That's the name. What's the use of talkin' at cross-purposes? He's the—"

"I know nothing about Morell."

Luke was emphatic. "He was a friend of Rex's—of Mr. Leferre's. I'd rather not discuss him."

The Sparrow sighed again, gathered up the papers on which the unfortunate Rex had practiced the signature and stuffed them back in his pocket-book.

"Nobody helps the police," he said dolefully. "All hands are against the natural guardians of the children of the poor. I'll be getting along."

He offered a limp hand and went heavily out of the room. The door had hardly closed upon him before the telephone bell rang, and for the first time since the tragedy Luke heard the voice of the woman he loved.

"Will you see me to-morrow, Luke?" Her voice was very low.

"Now, if I may—darling, let me come to you now."

But her level voice denied him.

"To-morrow—after this ghastly business, Luke, did Rex owe you any money?"

The unexpectedness of the question threw him off his balance, and when Luke Maddison was flurried he was invariably incoherent, for the same reason as others are incoherent in the circumstances—he thought too quick for speech.

"Yes—but it isn't worth discussing. He was heavily insured, you know, and I don't think the policy is invalidat-d."

He heard the quick breath and grew panic-stricken.

"I was thinking of you—that there

She was always staggering him with questions like that. "Why yes, I suppose I am. The bank isn't doing terribly well—on the trading side. We are merchants as well, you know—but I have over half a million private fortune. I thought you knew."

She smiled faintly.

"I have never asked you. I'm worried about—poverty. We have been poor—desperately. My father left us nothing, poor dear. It must be wonderful to be so rich—to have command of money—never to be bothered about bills, never to feel the frantic urge to go out and earn something."

He was regarding her in open-eyed astonishment.

"But I never knew, my dear, how awful! I thought you had an income?"

She shook her head. This time she was not acting.

"If money will give you a sense of security, and of course it will, I'll—why, I'd give you control of every cent I have in the world—"

He saw her incredulous smile and was angry with himself, as though in that gesture of unbelief he detected some reservation, some gesture of insincerity in his offer.

"Why not? Thousands of men put all their property in their wives' names. It's a sane thing to do—it keeps a man steady and it will make us really partners. Wait."

He was at the phone—as eager, as enthusiastic as a boy pursuing some new and delightful idea.

"Luke, is that your lawyer you're calling?"

Conscience overwhelmed her with a sudden fear; she realized for the first time the enormity of her treachery and was terrified.

"Yes, Hilton—it is Luke Maddison speaking. . . you had the draft of the antenuptial contract? Well, include everything! You have the list of my securities? . . . Yes, all. And the cash in bank—everything. My interest in Maddison's . . . no, I'm not mad!"

"You are!"

She was standing by him now, her face white as death. The words came tremulously.

"You're mad, Luke—I didn't mean it."

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

Schools to Observe 'Live-at-Home Week'

Raleigh, January 28.—As a part of Governor O. Max Gardner's live-at-home program for agriculture all the schools of the State will observe "Live-at-Home Week" February 10-14, according to announcement made by State Superintendent of Public Instruction A. T. Allen.

The 25,000 public school teachers and school officials have been requested by Governor O. Max Gardner to emphasize the live-at-home idea and to convey through the schools to the people of the community its importance. As an aid in the preparation of suitable programs for the observance of this week, a bulletin has been prepared giving suggestions, materials and helpful information concerning this program. This bulletin contains a message to the school children of the state by Governor Gardner, and material relating to the live-at-home program.

A topic for each day of the Live-at-Home Week is suggested as follows:

Monday February 10—Daily Food for the Family.

Tuesday, February 11—Importance of the Cow.

Wednesday, February 12—Importance of Poultry.

Thursday, February 13—Importance of the Hog.

Friday, February 14—Importance of the Garden.



Margaret Leferre could not understand herself; her own calm astonished her. Had she ever loved this suave man who stood before her?

young banker. "But at the same time I couldn't imagine a business man like you doin' anything so silly! If you'll excuse the liberty. I called at the Northern & Southern Bank yesterday afternoon, but they were reticent—reticent' is a good word—an' referred me to you. But by an underhanded an' despicable trick I found that young Mr. Leferre cashed a check the other day for eighteen thousand."

"Yes—I gave him a check for that amount"

The Sparrow was frankly skeptical.

"Did you now? Maybe you'd like to show me the counterfoil of that check?"

For a second Luke was taken aback.

"If there were any reason for doing so, I could," he said coldly, "but I see no reason."

Mr. Bird was not abashed; he leaned his huge arms on the table, and when he spoke his voice was serious.

"I've no right to ask—I'm not the sort of man who would attempt to pull a bluff on a gentleman like you. I'll put my cards on the table. That check was met in notes and I want to know where those notes went. There's a bird in London I want to catch. I've got one of the best lit cages for him that was ever built, an' while it's empty so is my heart. If that check was a forgery it might get the deceased a bad name but it would make it very easy for me to pull in a certain man for 'uttering.'"

"I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Maddison; I want that man's finger prints so much that I wonder I don't knock him down in the street an' take em!"

Luke's eyes were averted; he gave no sign until the detective had finished.

"I'm sorry I can't help you," he said. "The check was drawn by me and signed by me."

Mr. Bird rose with a sigh.

"You're too kind to the criminal

was no need to worry about his affairs. He owes me practically nothing."

"Will you see me to-morrow?"

"I see no reason in the world why the wedding should be postponed, Luke."

The hideous business of coroner's inquisition was only a day old, and an accountant's statement that the dead boy's affairs were involved was accepted and no details were asked.

Margaret Leferre could not understand herself; her own calm astonished her. Had she ever loved this suave man who stood before her, apparently agreeing as though Rex were his dearest friend? Sometimes she was afraid that he would read her loathing of him in her eyes—she was amazed to find herself telling him now, with the greatest calmness and in a tone that was sadly sweet, that she saw no reason why the ceremony should be postponed.

"My poor darling."

He took her in his arms, and she did not resist. Rather, she raised her cold lips to his, and hated herself. But the Judas kiss was his, not hers—that was a tattered comfort.

"There is nothing in the world I would not do to make life a little more smooth for you," he saw saying. "If money could buy you happiness I would beggar myself!"

She smiled faintly at this. Here was a man ready to betray his gods.

He had ruined Rex; he had always hated him. She remembered half-forgotten phrases of his, little irritated comments upon Rex's carelessness in financial matters.

He put her at arm's length and scrutinized her a little sadly. The pallor and the soft shadows beneath her eyes gave her an unearthly loveliness.

"Naturally I've been worried sick. What a fool I was on the phone to talk of insurance—it was indecent. I just didn't know what to say—"

"Luke, you are awfully rich."

For the best essays, posters and booklets State prizes will be offered to both white and colored pupils both rural and city and in the elementary schools and high schools. Superintendent Allen expects all of the 875,000 school children to take part in the activities during the prizes week, and to compete for the prizes offered. Announcements concerning these prizes will be made later, Superintendent Allen stated.

Colleges of State May Share In Funds

Originator of \$1,900,000,000 Endowment Plan Visiting Certain North Carolina Colleges With View Of Rendering Aid.

High Point, Jan. 25.—Dr. Albert Norman Ward, president of Westminster college of Maryland, is this week visiting High Point colleges and his visit here may have particular significance for the future of the local institution.

Dr. Ward is the originator of a plan to raise a billion dollars for small colleges in this country. The plan, if carried through, would give the local college an endowment of two million dollars.

Plans for this gigantic movement were presented recently by Dr. Ward at the American Association of Colleges in Washington, and hailed as

one of the most significant movements ever launched in America. A committee headed by Dr. Ward, appointed by the association, to investigate means of putting the plan into effect, will make its report at a meeting scheduled to be held in Chicago in the spring. Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia university, and ex-President Coolidge already have accepted invitations to attend.

Colleges showing less than a million dollar endowment and which can show a right to existence will be given a share in the funds.

Officials are confident High Point college would qualify.

Dr. Ward points out that heretofore only the larger and more famous institutions have been made the beneficiaries of large endowments.

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"I WAS suffering from stomach trouble in 1917," says Mr. C. K. Nelson, a railroad engineer living in Pulaski, Va. "I had a tightness in my chest, a shortness of breath. There seemed to be a heavy weight in the pit of my stomach, and quite a bit of nausea, yet I couldn't vomit. I tried different remedies, yet suffered on just the same. When in West Virginia on a work train, I was in such a condition that I just gave up and came home. I couldn't stand to work, in my condition. Some one told me about Black-Draught. I started taking it in small doses after meals. It helped me, and I went back to work."

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