



GUNMAN'S BLUFF

By *Edgar Wallace*

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SYNOPSIS

Margaret Leferre marries Luke Maddison, wealthy banker, after he has transferred to her every dollar he has in the world. After the ceremony he asks her for some money with which to pay an obligation. She refuses, declaring that she shall never have a cent of his money back. She discloses to him the fact that her brother, Rex, who was found shot, had left a note saying that Maddison had ruined him, and Margaret had married Luke for revenge. She does not know that Rex had forged Maddison's name to a large check. Maddison leaves her and wanders about London, trying to understand what happened, when he meets Lewing, an underworld character who has previously brought him a message from Gunner Haynes, a famous American crook. Danton Morell, a friend of crook.

The two are attacked by Joe Connors' gang, who think Luke is a detective whom Lewing has put on their trail. Lewing is killed and Maddison seriously wounded. He recovers consciousness two weeks later and finds he is known in the hospital only as "Smith." He decides to retain that name. A messenger from Connors calls at the hospital, gives him \$25 and the address of a Mrs. Fraser, explaining that there is a room there for him and that the gang wants to make amends for its mistake in attacking him. Luke goes to the "Ginnett" street address and finds a good room ready for him.

Meantime Margaret has had a telegram from Paris signed "Luke" saying he has found consolation elsewhere and will let her have a divorce. She doubts that it is genuine. Danton Morell, a friend of her brother

ly, for when he opened the case he found it still enclosed in oil paper. Shaving was a painful process in spite of this, but apparently the results were satisfactory, for when the woman brought him some food later she stood in the doorway and gaped her approval.

"Well, I should never have known you, Mr. Smith," she said, "and I'll bet your best friend wouldn't know you!"

As to this Luke was perfectly convinced. What an extraordinary change a mustache made in a man's appearance! To him it lent a touch of the sinister—he stood gazing, fascinated, at his reflection in the mirror.

Mrs. Fraser seemed more inclined to be conversational than she had been before; asked him if he was married and before he could answer announced herself as a widow.

"At least, practically," she amended the statement. "My husband got a liver two years ago."

She was quite cheerful about this calamity, and Luke gathered that life had not run any too smoothly for the woman.

"He asked for it," she said. "Shot a copper and nearly killed him; and naturally, Connor wouldn't stand for that. Connor says a gun's all right for the heads but not for the unders. Fraser was that kind—flash! He tried everything—"

"Had he been in prison before?" she smiled amusedly.

"Why of course! He did two stretches."

Luke did not ask what a stretch might be, he had a vague idea that it meant a jail sentence.

"He did one stretch," said the communicative Mrs. Fraser, "for a swindle up in Manchester—he and

hip pocket. The one thing he did not wish to challenge was a scene with two members of the rival gang. It was vital that he should get away from Ginnett Street with the least possible delay, and if his pistol helped him it was welcome.

"They want to see you—" she began.

And then a voice came from the foot of the narrow stairs.

"Come on, Smith!"

There was a menace in the tone. Mrs. Fraser flung open the door.

"Wait!" she said sharply. "Who do you think you are?"

Luke heard a grumbling voice and the slam of the door which separated the foot of the stairs from the parlor. And then, at the beckoning jerk of the woman's head, he followed her down the stairs.

There were two men in the parlor. One stood with his back to the fire, the other significantly near the door that gave egress to the shop. They were respectively dressed. Luke realized that if he had seen them in the street he would have thought they were decent artisans. There was certainly nothing sinister in either face. One was tall and rather stout, the other a slightly built man, who wore as his necktie the colors of a cavalry regiment.

The big man who stood with his back to the fire lowered his chin to his breast and looked at Luke from under his eyebrows.

"Is this Smith?" he asked.

"That is Mr. Smith," said Mrs. Fraser primly.

"What's the idea of your coming here and pretending you're somebody you're not?" asked the little man by the door with extraordinary rapidity.

His big companion silenced him.

"You shut up. I'll do all the talking, Curly," he said. "You did that job today, didn't you, Smith?"

"I've done many jobs," said Luke coolly.

"You're pretending you're a fellow named Smith whom our governor brought over from Australia—no, I'm not talking about Lewing; he was nobody. Swank killed him, and he's well dead. But you're not Smith. He pointed a finger to the man at the door. "That's Curly Smith."

"I'll say I am."

The little man was quivering with anger; he spoke with a shrill, peevish whine.

"You've been using my name"—he qualified the name with a violent adjective.

The stout man by the fire rebuked him.

"There are ladies present," he said, with such solemnity that Luke almost laughed at the incongruity of the reproach.

"The point is," said the big man, who, Luke discovered, was named Verdi, "you was picked up when Lewing was chived—and you got yours too, and naturally Connor thought you were the man that Lewing was supposed to meet off the boat in the London Docks. And instead of going to meet him, Lewing got cold feet, because he thought the Connor lot were after him for a squeal. But you're not Smith, and I'll take my oath you've never been

to Australia."

"Him!" Curly Smith was quivering with contempt. "That feller couldn't get a living in Australia."

He suddenly tugged a newspaper from his side pocket.

"Do you see what you've done for me?" he hissed, and thrust the paper under Luke's nose.

Luke Maddison read the paragraph which the grimy thumb of the man stabbed.

In connection with this robbery the police are seeking information concerning a man named Smith who landed a few weeks ago from the Orient liner, Pontiac.

"Do you see what you've done?" repeated Smith savagely. "You've got the dicks after me!"

His hand strayed to his trousers pocket.

"Steady your mitt!" growled Verdi. "This bird's got a gat—what do you think the old woman went up to see him about?"

Mrs. Fraser flamed at the insult.

"Old, am I, vou fat snail. We'll see what Connor says to that! He'll be here in five minutes"

Verdi glanced uneasily at the door.

"Bluff," he said. "Anyway, Connor can't complain if we come around to make a few inquiries. We're entitled to a bit of information."

"Do you want to see me any more?" said Luke, and moved toward the door.

Curly Smith stood squarely in his way.

"We want to know—" began Verdi. "You know all you're likely to know," said Luke curtly.

He took another step forward, but Smith did not move. Suddenly, Luke's hand shot up, gripped the little man and swung him around the room. It was not a moment to compromise or to argue; instinctively he knew he was taking the right line as he pulled the door wide open.

"Get outside, both of you!" he said.

Verdi shrugged his broad shoulders.

"That's all right," he said. "We don't want any unpleasantness."

He was smiling when he came abreast of Luke; but Mrs. Fraser had slipped to the other side of the table, and saw the life preserver he carried in his right hand.

"Look out!" she cried shrilly.

As the deadly little stick rose, Luke struck for the man's jaw and he went over with a crash against the wooden partition which separated the shop from the parlor.

For a moment he was stunned, and in that time Luke had jerked the life preserver from the man's hand (a leather cord attached to it was dropped in his pocket) and had "Come on, you!" He beckoned Curly Smith, and the little man sidled nimbly past him.

Verdi was on his feet by now a little dazed, blinking with his pale

blue eyes at the man who had knocked him down.

"All right," he said, and went heavily after his companion.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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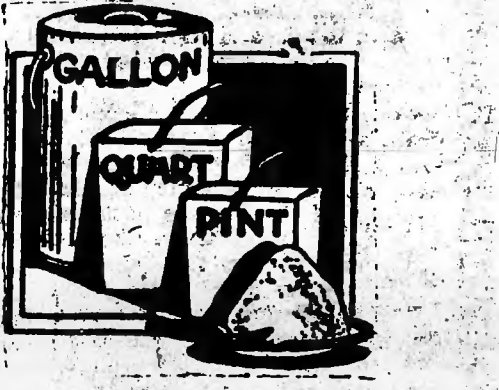
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"Do you see what you've done?" repeated Smith, savagely. "You've got the dicks after me."

Rex, calls on her to try to get some money. She horrifies him by telling him that she has given all the money which Luke gave her back to his trustee, who is making her an allowance to live on. She is convinced that Luke has gone to his favorite resort in Spain and intends to join him there. Morell realizes that Margaret is in love with her husband and that his own schemes are likely to fall through.

While they are talking Gunner Haynes is announced. Morell begs her not to see him, and when she insists, Morell hides in another room. Haynes admits that he is a jewel thief and that he is just out of prison, but Luke Maddison had once tried to do him a favor and he wants to return it if possible. He asks if Danton Morell is a friend of hers and why her husband left her.

Margaret sees Luke driving a car in company with a fair-haired girl. She does recognize her husband, with his beard, but overhears a passer-by refer to the woman in the car as Jean Gurlay, the cleverest woman crook in London. Luke in his new environment has been asked to act as her chauffeur. He drives her to a famous jewelry shop and waits at the curb for her to come out. She rushes from the store, jumps in and tells him to drive on at once. He does so, and is amazed the next day to read in the papers of a jewel robbery by a woman who got away in a car driven by a bearded man. He has unwittingly been made an accomplice of thieves and considers fleeing to Spain, but realizes that he has no passport.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

Luke dismissed from his mind his experience of the afternoon. That was something not to be thought of with-out a shudder—he was whistling cheerfully when Mrs. Fraser came with a pair of bright, new scissors to collect the gray tweed suit he had discarded, and to bring him a pair of brown shoes, so hideously bright that they dazzled him.

"Connor says you'd better leave your mustache," she suggested.

"Where is Connor? Is he on the premises?"

She shook her head.

"No, he phoned me."

"I didn't know you had a phone," he said in surprise.

Mrs. Fraser smiled critically.

"We've got lots of things here that people don't know anything about," she said.

She came back a little later with a tube of shaving paste, a brand new lather brush, and a razor which had evidently been used recently

Danton Morell was in it—"

Luke's jaw dropped.

"Dandy?" he said incredulously.

"Who is he?"

"He's a con man—you must have heard of him. I think he's straight now, but you never can tell. He lives up west, knows all the swells, and has got a flat in Half Moon St. He and Gunner Haynes used to work together—"

"Gunner Haynes—you know him?" asked Luke quickly.

From her expression and tone he gathered that Haynes was a person of some importance in the hierarchy of the underworld.

"No, I don't know him. I've only heard of him. But what do they call Dandy now?" She frowned in an effort of memory. "I had it on the tip of my tongue—a swell name. Danton Morell—that's it! Connor told me only the other day about him."

The room seemed to swim before Luke Maddison's eyes. Danton Morell—a confidence man, an ex-convict? It was incredible! And then suddenly he had the stunning realization that Dandy Morell was his wife's best friend.

"What is he like in appearance?"

"Dandy? I've seen him two or three times . . ."

She described Morell in her homely language. There was no doubt at all that this was the man! It was more vitally necessary than ever that he should escape from this environment and reappear as Luke Maddison.

His vague plans became definite. He could leave the house that night seek out Hulbert, and tell him the truth.

At nine o'clock that night he was preparing to leave when an unexpected difficulty arose. He was just about to turn out the light when Mrs. Fraser appeared. She closed the door behind her, and from her manner he gathered that something serious had happened.

"Two of the Lewing crowd are down below," she said in a low voice. "I haven't had a chance to call up Connor; the phone is in the parlor, and they came in before I knew what was happening."

She had something hid under her apron, and when she withdrew her hand, he saw that it was a small Browning pistol.

"Put that in your sky," she said urgently. "You don't know what the fellows are after."

"I'm mv—" he began, bewildered.

"In your pocket," she said impatiently. "Do as you're told."

Mechanically he took the pistol from her hand and slipped it into his

There are ladies present," he said, with such solemnity that Luke almost laughed at the incongruity of the reproach.

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