

GUNMAN'S BLUFF

By **Edgar Wallace**
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was a stupid question to ask him had a private phone. He knew that any message from Margaret would come through to him direct. The manager shook his head.

"Yes, yes," Luke's usually gentle voice was harsh. "Tell the manager it is alright."
"I told him yesterday, as a matter of fact," Mr. Stiles was inclined to linger on the subject which was hateful to the other. In desperation Luke reverted to the question of the Gulanga Oil Concession, and for once Mr. Stiles' father interest in the business irritated him.

NERVES went to Pieces

suffered a long time, before Cardui," says Mrs. Lillie St. Anderson, S. C. "My nerves went to pieces, and I had to go to bed. I almost set me wild. I became hysterical. I had pains in my back and my head and limbs take spells of aching, almost set me wild. One day I saw where a woman who had a trouble like my had been relieved by Cardui. I decided at once to try it. It helped me from the very first. I took Cardui regularly, for months, and my improvement was so remarkable my family and friends were delighted. Cardui for your troubles."

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Royster — SEEMS TO HAVE SOMETHING THE OTHERS DO NOT HAVE

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 brought the check to him. It is the simplest thing in the world to forge a name and so far as he had been able to judge there were no flaws in Rex Leferre's signature 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 moment. "Just a moment." He rose and opened the 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 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 bargain' 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 an' address—an' that's as much as any policeman's about anybody."

Bad business, this young Leferre case, Mr. Maddison. You don'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 and Southern Bank—that's where you keep your private account, ain't it? An' this—"

Very leisurely he took out a fat self telling him now with the 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 the flat and Luke saw a succession of signatures, one under the other: "Luke Maddison—Luke Maddison"

"Looks almost as though you had been scribblin' absent-mindedly." The detective's shrewd eyes were on the 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 and Southern Bank yesterday, 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." 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."

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 wife's names. It's a sane thing to do—it keeps a man steady and it will make us real partners. Wait."

He was at the telephone—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 the bank—everything. My interest in Maddison's . . . no, I'm not mad!"

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

"You're mad, Luke—I didn't mean it."

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



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