

GUNMAN'S BLUFF

BY *Edgar Wallace*

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(Ninth Installment)
"Paddington," he said, and swung himself deftly inside. Evidently the driver was in some doubt as to whether he should continue. He went about two blocks and then pulled the car up by the side of the curb. "Where have you come from?" he asked. "I can't take you, gov-nor. You look as if you were running away from some body."

"I was," said Luke. "It was not a moment to argue. He threw a two-shilling piece into the man's hand, turned down a narrow street conveniently near, and doubling back, reached the main road. Here he found a taxi moving at leisure, and a driver who did not question his bona fides.

The cab drew up at the entrance of Scotland Yard and Luke went swiftly down the declivity and into the gloomy entrance hall. A police officer on duty challenged him and asked his requirements.

"Mr. Bird's been gone for two hours, sir. I think he's gone into the country. Would you like to see anybody else?"

Groaning inwardly, Luke shook his head. He came out on the Thames Embankment at one end of the Yard as Gorton and his Flying Squad came in at the other door. Turning left, he walked toward Waterloo Bridge. At Charing Cross Underground he made another attempt to get into touch with the Sparrow. There was a

chance that the policeman was wrong and that Bird was still in town. He went to the telephone directory, but there were so many Birds that it was impossible to tell which was which. And then he remembered one of his initials—and unusual "Z" (Mr. Zia). He scanned the list again and going into the telephone booth, gave a number.

At first he thought his luck was in. "Yes, this is Mr. Bird's house," said a voice, "but e's out of town. Who is it speaking."

"It is vitally necessary that I should get in touch with him as soon as possible," said Luke urgently. "Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"Who are you?"

"Will you tell him it's Mr. Maddison speaking. I have been to Scotland Yard. He felt a sudden draught. The door of the telephone booth was ajar; an unconcerned man was standing near by, and apparently had no interest either in him or his conversation. Luke shut the door again, and then, to his annoyance, found that whoever had spoken for Mr. Bird had hung up her receiver. Still, that was a start. He almost felt a sense of relief as he came out on to the cold Embankment and pursued his way toward Waterloo.

He had not gone twenty yards before two men, walking quickly, overtook him and fell in one at each side. "Hullo, Smith! Connor wants

to see you."

He had never seen the man before. His tone was offensive and peremptory.

"And who may Mr. Connor be?" asked Luke coolly. "My name is not Smith, it is Maddison."

"That's alright, sir," said the other more respectfully; "but Mr. Connor does want to see you pretty badly."

"Where is he?" asked Luke after a moment's thought.

"At the top of Savoy Hill—there goes the Squad."

A car flashed past at that moment; the red light disappeared along the Embankment.

"They call 'em busies and they are busy," said the second man bitterly.

They did not go up Savoy Hill but turned aside, passed one entrance to the Savoy Hotel and up a steep and narrow street. They turned again to the right.

"Where is Connor?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, when I've got a light for my fag," said the smaller of the two.

He struck a match, and Luke's eyes instinctively went to it. That is all he remembered. He did not feel the pain of any blow but dropped limply to the pavement under the impact of a rubber cosh.

His head was splitting when he came to senses. He was lying on the hard floor of a jolting motor car; he discovered afterward it was a tilting Ford wagon that bore innocuously enough the name of a respectable firm of greengrocers. The two men were squatting by his side; one was smoking, and they were carrying on a conversation in a low voice.

"That's what Connor told me," said one. "But then, Connor always thought this nut would put up a squeal."

Luke lay motionless; his head was throbbing, but he felt no other discomfort. Apparently, although he could guess there was a bump as big as an egg on his skull, the blow had not drawn blood.

The car stopped and the engine was shut off.

"Are you awake?" asked a voice.

"I'm awake, alright," said Luke.

"Then get out of this. Why was you so foolish, Smith?"

A mild question from a man who, only ten minutes before had stunned him.

He found himself in a room not only furnished but overfurnished.

Connor was sitting at a table shuffling a pack of cards. He looked up as Luke entered the room.

"Did you have to cosh him?" he asked pleasantly.

The man who held Luke's arm gripped.

"He wouldn't be sensible," he said.

Connor pointed to a horsehair sofa against the wall, and Luke was glad to accept the invitation.

"Tried to put up a squeal, did you, Smith?"

There was nothing unfriendly in Connor's tone, but he did not cease shuffling the cards as he spoke.

"I thought you were a man when you did that bust—yes, one of my lads saw you get into that flat, and saw you when you bolted. But you're nothing better than a dirty squealer. Went in the Yard and asked for the Sparrow, did you? Is he a pal of yours?"

"I know him," said Luke.

Mr. Connor nodded pleasantly. "And then you tried to get him on the phone—what was the squeal about? Don't trouble to tell me: I know. I never trusted you from the first, Smith. I don't trust Australians."

Despite his aching head, Luke could but smile at this libel.

"I shouldn't think they trust you a great deal, do they?" he asked.

"Not much," said Connor. He cut the pack into two, shuffling them scientifically, and all the time his eyes were on Luke.

"So you know the Sparrow? That's good. I'll bet you know Danty, too."

Luke started.

Why had Danty gone out of his mind? Why had he forgotten that Danty was the confident of his wife—that his one desire in seeking freedom from the sinister environment in which he found himself, had been to expose that confidence man?

seem to know the whole darn shoot! "I'm telling you, Smith, that a man that knows Danty and the Lewing gang, and calls at Scotland Yard to see his friend the Sparrow, isn't a healthy fellow to have around the house."

There was a long pause, and then he added:

"That's why you're not going to be around the house."

He looked up at one of the men thoughtfully.

"When is high tide?"

"Four o'clock."

Connor nodded. Again his dark eyes fell on Luke.

"You a good swimmer?"

"Fair," said Luke coolly. "We'll give you a little dip to-night," said Connor. "Put him in the cooler, Harry."

Connor carried on a legitimate if unprofitable business. He was a dealer in certain building material, and barges came regularly but at rare intervals to this wharf and were unloaded. He bought and sold scrap iron, cement, any commodity which offered immediate profit. The wharf could be, and was, hired for a fee.

A few paces from the door of

the sitting room they came to another. Luke could not help wondering whether the little chamber into which he was thrust had been used before for the same purpose. It had no windows, but in other respects was curiously like a prison cell. It might have been employed for the storage of coal, but there was nothing in it now, not even a bed or a stool. In the light of the man's electric torch he saw that the walls were of brick and white-washed. Then the door slammed on him; he heard a bolt shot and he was left alone with the unpleasant knowledge that it would be high tide in five hours, and that Mr. Connor, in his amiable way, had planned "a dip" for him.

Margaret found several sheets of notepaper on the floor of Luke's room. She picked up one, read it and gasped. The date had been scrawled in on the top line, and it began:

My dear Margaret, I am a most terrible—

It was Luke's writing! It was Luke who had been there that night. She found another sheet covered with smudged writing;

this also was addressed to the solicitor, but the three scrawled lines were undecipherable. He had deliberately crossed them out. Evidently he had sat down to write a letter to Hulbert, had made two attempts and then had changed his mind.

It was so like Luke; he could never resist the temptation offered by a sheet of note paper—he must write somebody, he had often told her.

Luke had been here; Luke was the burglar. But why?

She turned to the detective, and was on the tip of her tongue to make the revelation when he said something that struck speech from her lips.

"He must have been a pretty bad man, that fellow—one of our men recognized him as the chap who was driving a car this afternoon when Taffanny's was robbed. He gave one of the shop assistants a punch in the jaw—"

"But that's impossible!" she said indignantly. "This man—"

"Ah, you've read about it in the papers—a bearded man. That's right, madam, he's taken his beard off this afternoon. Johnson—that's the officer—

saw him driving with a girl around the park."

Again speech died on her lips. "They got her tonight," said the communicative detective. Mr. Borton's pretty certain she'll put up a squeal—I mean to say she will tell who her companion was. From all accounts he's a man who's been seen about with her a great deal in the past year or two."

(Continued next week)

Many apartment houses and homes are being built in Panama City.

Uruguay has had a great influx of tourists from Argentina.

Postal savings in Japan recently passed the \$1,000,000,000 mark.

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