

GUNMAN'S BLUFF

By *Edgar Wallace*
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SYNOPSIS

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

After the wedding Luke is approached by a man named Lewing who brings him the news that Gunner Haynes has been arrested and is in need of money. Maddison gives Lewing ten pounds. Two o'clock Luke Maddison and Margaret are married at the Registry Office. She goes to her house, where Luke joins her. She refuses to let him kiss her, and asks to postpone their wedding journey. Luke remembers that he has certain payments to meet which he had forgotten. He asks his wife

to remember his face. "I've seen you before somewhere, haven't I?" "I dare say," said Luke, and turned away abruptly. He followed the homeward-wending crowd across Blackfriars Bridge. It was dark and cold, and he struggled into the overcoat which he had been carrying on his arm. He remembered somewhere in the borough that he entered a little coffee-house, redolent of burning lard. At eleven o'clock it began to rain, a fine drizzle that very soon soaked through the light coat. He was walking aimlessly along York Road in the direction of Westminster. A man ahead of him was walking more slowly, a slouching man with his hands in his pockets and his coat collar turned up. Luke was wearing rubber-soled shoes, and came up to the walker before he was aware of his presence. He saw the night wanderer lurch sideways with a snarl, stoop forward as though he were going to run, and then something in Luke's face or appearance checked his flight. "Hullo!" he said huskily. "Thought you was a busy."

Luke recognized him. "You're Lewing, aren't you?" The man peered into his face. "Blimey, if it ain't Mr. What's-your-name!—Maddison! What you doing down here? You should have come and seen me down Tooley Street; this ain't my pitch."

Twice he looked back furtively over his shoulder. "You thought I was a detective?" The thin lips of the man twisted in

said Luke coldly. "Mr. Bird told me all about you." There was an embarrassed silence. "Anyway, I'd like to stay with me, sir," said the man. "I called you a busy just now, and you look like a busy. If any of them Connors see me with a busy they'll—"

They had just turned the corner into an even narrower street, and Lewing stopped suddenly. Four dark shapes, two on the pavement, two in the roadway, confronted them. Luke surveyed them curiously. They all seemed to have caps drawn over their eyes; each man had both hands in his pockets. "Here, what's the idea, Joe?" Lewing's voice was a whine. "This gentleman is taking me around—"

The leader of the four laughed harshly. "You've got to have a busy with you, have you?" he said with an oath. "You ain't satisfied with nosing on us Connors, but you got to carry Scotland Yard strapped under your arm. That's yours, Lewing!"

To Luke it only seemed that the man had edged a little closer to Lewing as he spoke. Lewing coughed and fell groggily against Luke. "Get the busy," said a snarling voice. Luke swung back but not quite in time. He saw the glitter of steel and felt as though a hot iron had been drawn across his breast; and then a curious weakness came to him, and he leaned back against the wall and gradually slipped into a sitting position. His last conscious impression was the clattering feet of running men; four dark shapes vanished into a greater darkness, and he was left alone, with something that sprawled across the pavement, staring with unseeing eyes at the flickering light of the street lamps.

It was the thirteenth day after the disappearance of Luke Maddison, and a day of fate for his wife, since it put a period to the long and agonizing hours of doubt and uncertainty, of self-reproach that at times approached self-loathing. Twice she had been on the point of acquainting the police and twice had Danty stopped her. It was a time of worry for Danty also, but from quite another cause. What had puzzled, and to some degree comforted her, was the fact that Mr. Stiles, the manager of Maddison's Bank, had shown no particular anxiety. She guessed, or knew, that Luke had told him of her act, for when she had offered her check it had been almost peremptorily refused. What she did not realize was that in the days before she became a factor in Luke Maddison's life, and largely determined his actions, Luke was in the habit of disappearing into the blue. Invariably it was from Spain that Stiles had received a postcard notifying him of the imminent return of his employer. The country had a fascination for Luke Maddison. He spoke the language like a native. He

was one of the few Englishmen who understood and enjoyed the punctilio of bull fighting, and he loved nothing better than to retire to some lodging in Cordoba or Ronda and, making that his headquarters, rove the countryside for weeks on end. Stiles was uneasy, but he had that hope left, that in this great crisis of his affairs, Luke Maddison had gone back to the scenes of his happy holidays.

Margaret opened a drawer of her desk, took out a folded sheet of paper and handed it to Morrell. It was a telegram addressed to Margaret Maddison:

"You can hardly expect me to come back to you. In a few months I will furnish you with sufficient evidence to enable you to secure a divorce. I am not entirely without money, therefore I am not entirely without pleasant consolations."

It was signed "Luke" and had been handed in at Paris at eight-thirty that morning.

"That's that," she said. Her tone was light, but there was an agitation in her heart which she had not intended to show. "Consolations! And this was Luke Maddison, the idealist—a vulgar philanderer, who had fled to—consolations!"

"I'm rather surprised that you got this," said Danton gravely. "I shouldn't have thought he would have troubled to write."

A few days later, on the center page of the Post-Herald Margaret saw the photograph of a haggard and unshaven man. It had evidently been taken in a hospital bed. His eyes were closed; the photograph just showed the edge of the sheet a few inches under his chin.

"Do You Know This Man?" demanded the headline.

She glanced at the letter-press, and saw that it had reference to a murder in London, and that he whose picture was shown had been present and had only escaped death by the narrowest of margins. Not even his dearest

friend would have recognized Luke Maddison, for the photograph had not been taken until the eleventh day of his detention in hospital, and it had been taken in a very poor light.

They put Luke Maddison in a private ward, and one morning they left a little temperature chart within his view, and he saw that his name was Smith.

"How long have I been Smith?" His voice was extraordinarily strong, remembering that only a few days before he had not been able to speak above a whisper.

The good-natured nurse grinned cheerfully.

"If I don't know people's names we call them Smith—preferably Bill," she said. "But you're going to be good, aren't you, and tell us yours?" He shook his head.

"No, I don't think so. Smith is a very good name, borne by some very nice people. If my name had been Smith I might have been a better man," he added whimsically.

Since they had moved him into the private ward the burly-looking policeman who had loomed out of his dreams, and seemed part of them, had been taken away. That day they thought he was dying a police magistrate had been summoned to take his deposition; but, he had told nothing which was of the slightest consequence or value. Moreover, he had heard one detective say to another that he would not be of the slightest value as a witness at the inquest. So he could afford to lie and watch the hours pass, and the pale light of the sun move across the green wall, and night come and the lights.

He did not care really what happened after. It was his sixteenth or seventeenth day in bed—he was not sure which—when the sister came in.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The average motorist in the United States spent \$293 last year in repairing and keeping up his car.

The timber yoke of the Liberty bell, which was weakened by dry rot, has been saved by a reinforcing of strong steel.

Tell them to eat Ice-Cream and drink Milk to prevent Colds.

Health Commissioner Kegel of Chicago interviews to the representatives of the press advocating that everyone eat Ice Cream and drink Milk to prevent Colds.

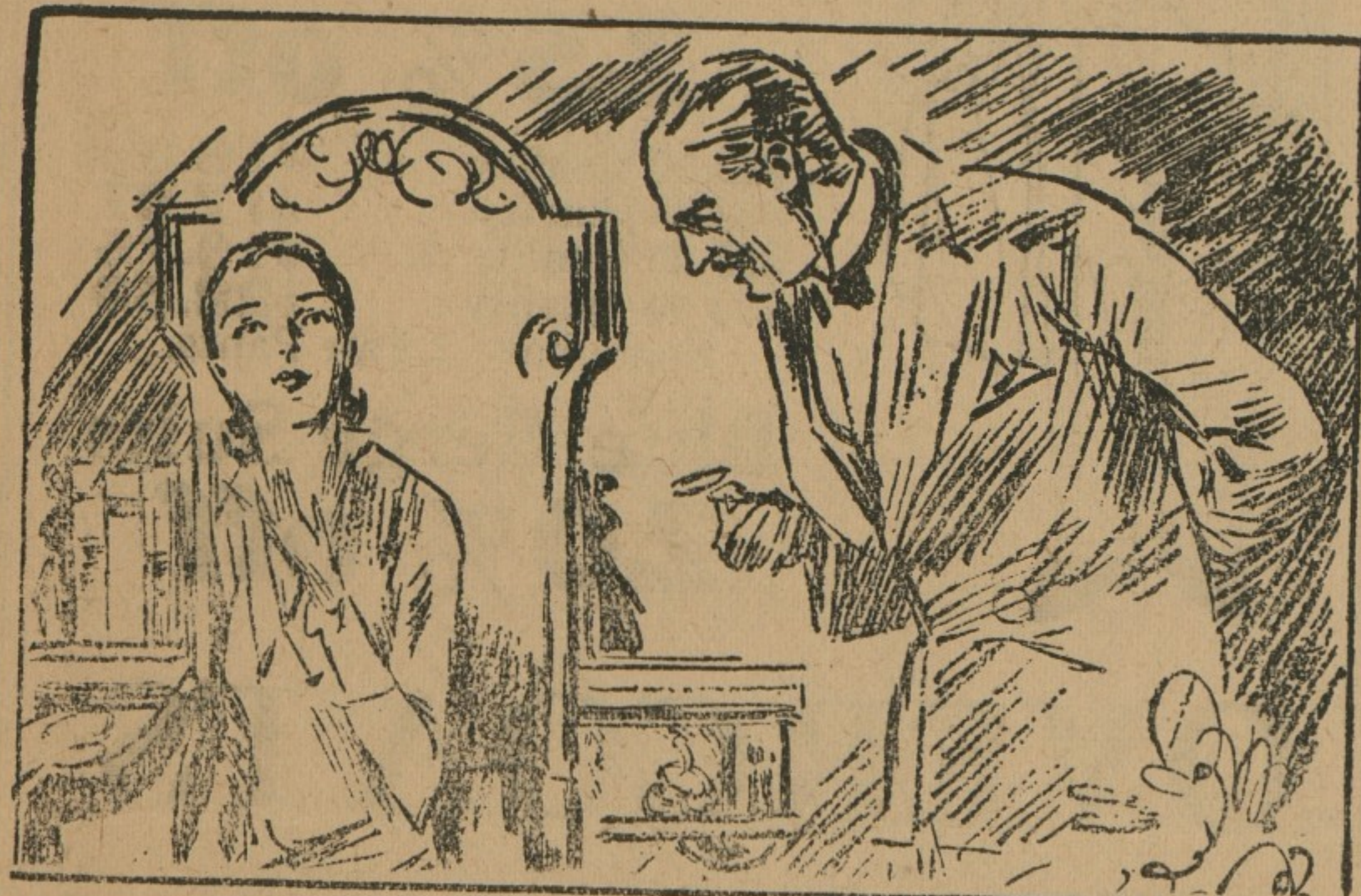
"The part foods play in building up resistance against colds is often overlooked," he said, "The intelligent way to avoid colds is to prevent them."

A meal consisting of meat, potatoes, two or three vegetables, topped off with a dish of Ice Cream, is a big factor in keeping up bodily resistance.

Ice cream in fact, may well be indorsed as a winter food. Contary to general opinion, there is no harm in the consumption of cold drinks or iced foods. By the time they enter the stomach they are raised to body temperature.

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to give him a check for 97,000 a year. "That's what I said. No, I thought you was one of Connor's lot. They chased me out of Rotherhithe tonight, said I'd been 'nosing' on 'em. That's why I'm around here. Connor's crowd always thinks that someone's been nosing if one of his gang's dragged."

"Nosing? You mean spying?" "Giving 'em away to the police," explained Mr. Lewing. "Connor's brother got caught the other night and they got a yarn down Tooley Street that I'd done it."

Luke began dimly to understand. "Come down here."

The clawlike hands of Lewing caught him and dragged him down a narrow, ill-lit street.

"I'm nervous to-night," he said, and here he was speaking the truth, for his voice became a little whimpering gasp. "You're a gentleman, Mr. Maddison. You'd help a pore feller to get away. You know what Connor is—he'd knife you for twopence. Bumping off, he calls it—he's an American; at least, he's been in Sing Sing. Sing, Sing, is it? Anyway, it's a stir. A couple of quid'd get me out of London."

"I haven't got a couple of pounds with me," said Luke.

He was already weary of the companionship, and, but for being in his present condition, would never have submitted to being dragged into this foul little street.

"Perhaps I can call at your office in the morning?" Lewing's voice betrayed his anxiety. And then, as he remembered, "I give that ten pounds to the Gunner—"

"You gave nothing to the Gunner?"

Opposite the Temple station he rested again. There was a narrow street running up to the Strand—North Street, wasn't it? And his lawyer had his office there. Why not see him and tell him all that had happened? It was the same thing to do. But then Luke Maddison realized that he was not sane. He was the maddest thing in the maddest world.

He went on toward Blackfriars and came to a halt before the tram station. There was a long queue of people waiting to board the cars which arrived empty and went rolling along the Embankment crowded with humanity. Husbands and wives, possibly; young men going back to sweethearts; young men and girls who had faith in some men or other and were ready to make every sacrifice for them. To Luke Maddison every car that drew away was laden with happy people, their day's work ended, their recreations and pleasures of the night before theirs.

Old men, young men; girls looking trim and smart; young men smoking big pipes, with a newspaper under their arms; bespectacled students—they hypnotized him, these great, blazing trams.

He was standing with his back to the parapet, his elbows resting on the stone.

"Are you waiting for somebody?" The voice had authority, though it was quite kind. He looked up to meet the suspicious scrutiny of a City policeman. The City police do not like to see men lingering in their way, one hand on the parapet, the swirling black river below—especially a white-faced man, with a tense face and an almost horrified stare.

"No," stammered Luke, "I'm just watching."

The policeman was looking at him curiously, as though he was trying

to remember his face. "I've seen you before somewhere, haven't I?" "I dare say," said Luke, and turned away abruptly. He followed the homeward-wending crowd across Blackfriars Bridge. It was dark and cold, and he struggled into the overcoat which he had been carrying on his arm. He remembered somewhere in the borough that he entered a little coffee-house, redolent of burning lard. At eleven o'clock it began to rain, a fine drizzle that very soon soaked through the light coat. He was walking aimlessly along York Road in the direction of Westminster. A man ahead of him was walking more slowly, a slouching man with his hands in his pockets and his coat collar turned up. Luke was wearing rubber-soled shoes, and came up to the walker before he was aware of his presence. He saw the night wanderer lurch sideways with a snarl, stoop forward as though he were going to run, and then something in Luke's face or appearance checked his flight. "Hullo!" he said huskily. "Thought you was a busy."

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KENT COUNTY SAVINGS BANK
CHESTERTOWN, MD.

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