

GUNMAN'S BLUFF

Edgar Wallace
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SYNOPSIS

Rex Lefere forges the name of Luke Maddison, wealthy banker and his sister Margaret's fiancé, to a large check. He is found dead with a note in his handwriting accusing Maddison of avarice. Margaret marries Luke Maddison, after he has given her everything he owns. She leaves him, telling him she has ruined him to revenge her brother, Luke, bewildered, wanders about London, is attacked by thugs who take him for a detective, recovers in hospital to find he is known as "Smith." In this new character he becomes involved with the Joe Connors gang, who mistake him for an Australian crook named Smith, and is made an unwilling accomplice in a jewel robbery. He does not know that Margaret has returned and has returned to his bankers all the money he gave her, to the dismay of one Danton Morell, her dead brother's friend, concerning whom Gunner Haynes, an American jewel thief, whom Maddison had once befriended, has been making inquiries. Detective Bird of Scotland Yard, known also as The Sparrow, is likewise interested in Morell. Maddison goes to his own old bachelor quarters, is taken for a burglar, escapes from the police and tries to get in touch with Detective Bird. The Connors gang learn of this, and bag and imprison him in an underground cell near the river where he is certain to be drowned when the tide rises. Meantime Margaret, revisiting Luke's old rooms finds a sheet of paper on which Luke had begun a letter to his friend and lawyer saying that he is in desperate trouble. Margaret's joy over the recovery that Luke is alive and in London is tempered by the statement of Detective Bird that the man concerned in the jewel robbery, whom she now knows was Luke, had been going around for two years with the woman whose accomplice he was.

Gunner Haynes drops into Joe Connors' hiding-place just as Connors' men are fastening Luke's feet with chains to a large block of rock salt, intending to throw him in the river, where the salt will dissolve, the chains drop off and the body will be found without marks of violence. Haynes defies the Connors gang and takes Maddison into the yard, pausing as he sees two men climbing the fence. The Gunner takes Luke to his room and learns from him the reason Margaret hated him was because she blamed him for her brother's death. Then Haynes calls on Margaret and offers to help her and her husband. Maddison is kidnapped from Haynes' rooms. Meantime, Haynes gets into Danton Morell's rooms and finds there proofs that the letter which Rex Lefere had left for Margaret was a forgery. Rex had been trying to warn his sister against Morell not against Luke. And Morell gets into Margaret's rooms and steals some blank checks to one of which he forges Luke's name, and tries to get it cashed.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"For God's sake, Margaret, consider what you're doing!" She saw he was really alarmed; his voice was tremulous, his whole air suggested panic.

"I swear to you I don't know where Luke is—he was on a barge."

"Connor had him there. The swine didn't tell me that Maddison had signed a check. All he told me was that he jumped into the river and got away or was drowned—I don't know which. That's the truth. I knew nothing about it till Connor had found him. I swear to you this is the truth."

"Where is Connor?" she asked.

"I don't know. He was here this morning, and told me about Luke getting away. That's all the information I have. I didn't believe him, and probably it's a lie he told me."

He saw she was undecided and eagerly sought to turn her from her intention. He had no doubt that she meant what she had said.

"She did not know what to do."

"Could you find Haynes for me?"

"You don't imagine I would communicate with that fellow, do you? He's a dangerous man, Margaret—"

"Mrs. Maddison," she said coldly. "He's dangerous—you oughtn't to have any dealings with him."

He did not attempt to deny the theft of the checks.

"You don't know where Mr. Maddison is at all?"

He accepted the corrected relationship without murmur.

"No, Mrs. Maddison, I've no idea. Connor's been looking for him all night."

When she returned home she found the Sparrow waiting for her on the doorstep. The sight of a large kitbag at his feet surprised her, and when he carried it into the house and into the little study on the ground floor, she was to have a shock. She did not recognize the crumpled clothes he took from the bag.

"These clothes were found in the possession of a river thief, who was trying to sell them this morning," he said. "He didn't know that your husband's name was stitched in the inside pocket."

"My husband's name?" she gasped, turning pale. "Where did he get them?"

"That's what I want to know. The

yarn he tells is that last night he picked up a man who was wet through and who had come out of the river, and took him to a house. We've since verified that—though from the description I've had it couldn't possibly be Mr. Maddison, who is still abroad, I presume."

Was there a note of sarcasm in his voice? She thought she detected it, and very wisely did not answer.

"The man said the clothes were given to him, but that of course is the usual yarn. I have reason to believe that they were stolen while the owner was in bed. Can you throw any light upon them?"

She shook her head. It was a pitiable confession, but she knew she could not even recognize an old suit of clothes worn by her husband. It

then he was most anxious not to renew acquaintance with Scotland Yard. Things had gone badly with him; he owed a very large sum of money which had to be paid in the City on the following day; and now, with the added possibility of police intervention, his position was perilous.

Danton Morell was in some ways a careful man. However extravagant he might be, he had reserved for himself a fat nest egg in cash which in spite of all temptation, he had never touched. He had collected the money that day from two or three accounts which he ran in an assumed name. Nothing was needed now but to follow the line of retreat he had planned. There was a small aerodrome on the outskirts of London, from

which exhibition flights were given. Danty had found it expedient to finance the small company which owned the airplanes, and by telephone he arranged his flight. This was facilitated by the fact that the company had recently acquired a big rebuilt monoplane which was capable of a long flight. Danty, who had decided upon Switzerland for his first hop, gave orders for the storage of petrol and necessities for the journey. He certainly did not anticipate taking a companion with him, but he was not the only panic-stricken man in London.

Danty made a very quick search for papers which, left behind, might have awkward consequences, and his first attention was directed to the little box in which he kept the most dangerous of his correspondence. He brought this into the dining room before he discovered that the lock had been forced. With an exclamation he threw up the lid, shook out the contents. The one packet of letters that he had been mad to keep was gone! And the little telephone slip—that also had disappeared.

His hands were shaking so that he could hardly hold the papers he was examining. There was no need to speculate upon the identity of the man who had forced that box. The Gunner had been seen in the neighborhood; Pi Coles had told him that, and it had been the Gunner who had made this search and found the documents. Danty Morell saw death

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"What's the matter with you?" asked Connor, when they were back in the room.

"You've got a bit of a shock and I'm not particularly well. You know they're after those kites?"

Connor himself was not particularly happy-looking.

"I know. They've stopped a check I sent to the bank and half the busies in London are looking for him. They know who it is, too—that's the worst of it. You're in this, Danty."

"We're both in it, aren't we?" snarled the other. "I'm getting out of London to-night."

Connor laughed raucously.

"You've got a fine chance of getting out of London, unless you take a rattler." And then suddenly: "How are you going?"

It was on the tip of Danty's tongue to invent a method of escape, but just now he needed the association of Connor. Connor was not above using a gun at a pinch, and moreover, hated Gunner Haynes.

"I'm going by airplane from Elford," he said. "We've got the Gunner to thank for this. He squealed."

"He's never stopped squealing," said Connor without heat. "Where do you land in your flying machine?"

Danty told him his destination.

"That'll do for me," said Connor. He looked at the papers on the table.

"Having a burn-up?" he asked pleasantly. And then: "How much stuff have you got?"

Here Danty lied. He could not tell the truth about money.

The conference was a brief one. They agreed to visit the aerodrome that evening and make final preparations for their journey. The journey through the suburbs into outer London was a silent one, now and again Danty lifted the flap at the back of the hired car in which they were traveling, and peered along the darkening road.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Connor.

"There's a car, a two-seater, following us."

"Why shouldn't it?" demanded the other sarcastically. "Do you want the road to yourself?"

A few minutes later, when Danty looked back, the little car had disappeared.

The preparations for the night's journey were not easily made. The

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The conference was a brief one. They agreed to visit the aerodrome that evening and make final preparations for their journey. The journey through the suburbs into outer London was a silent one, now and again Danty lifted the flap at the back of the hired car in which they were traveling, and peered along the darkening road.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Connor.

"There's a car, a two-seater, following us."

"Why shouldn't it?" demanded the other sarcastically. "Do you want the road to yourself?"

A few minutes later, when Danty looked back, the little car had disappeared.

The preparations for the night's journey were not easily made. The

grinning at him; hypnotized into sheer inaction. When there came a knock at the outer door, he leaped up from his chair, a shivering wreck of a man, not daring to open to the visitor. He calmed himself sufficiently to go to the door and demand who was there, and when he heard Connor's voice he could have cried aloud for joy.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Connor, when they were back in the room.

"You've got a bit of a shock and I'm not particularly well. You know they're after those kites?"

Connor himself was not particularly happy-looking.

"I know. They've stopped a check I sent to the bank and half the busies in London are looking for him. They know who it is, too—that's the worst of it. You're in this, Danty."

"We're both in it, aren't we?" snarled the other. "I'm getting out of London to-night."

Connor laughed raucously.

"You've got a fine chance of getting out of London, unless you take a rattler." And then suddenly: "How are you going?"

It was on the tip of Danty's tongue to invent a method of escape, but just now he needed the association of Connor. Connor was not above using a gun at a pinch, and moreover, hated Gunner Haynes.

"I'm going by airplane from Elford," he said. "We've got the Gunner to thank for this. He squealed."

"He's never stopped squealing," said Connor without heat. "Where do you land in your flying machine?"

Danty told him his destination.

"That'll do for me," said Connor. He looked at the papers on the table.

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