

THE DUNCANS ARE COMING

Synopsis

A romantic comedy

This present-day romance takes place at the height of summer during greengage time at Beddington Hall, the 250 acre estate and farmland owned by Henry, Lord Beddington, situated on the South Coast.

William, a 22-year old computer student, is sent away to stay with his uncle, Lord Beddington, for a few weeks after failing his exams. His father, General Duncan, Lady Edith's black sheep brother, hopes he will learn something about estate management to keep his mind off his romantic entanglements.

After a series of unfortunate accidents to Lady Edith - after being strapped on a traction machine during a publicity event in aid of the local hospital, due to the over enthusiasm of the PR lady, Lavinia Fox Cuddles – and his Lordship, ending up with a ladder wrapped round his head, there is consternation as to who would take over organising the summer festival to save their local hospital, St. Mary's from being closed down.

Because General Duncan's previous visit turned out so disastrously, resulting in the beaching of the entire regatta fleet on sand banks - a yachting catastrophe still remembered with anguish – his latest offer to help is turned down hastily by Lady Edith who has long since suffered in his hands from her childhood. Thwarted out of taking over in her absence and seeing an opportunity of settling old scores, Lady Edith's rival on the Council, Mrs Muriel Fox Cuddles, blocks an attempt by Len Bartlett, a fellow Councillor, to promote his prized marina project, and persuades the Hospital Committee to put forward the General's name instead.

At her instigation, her daughter, Lavinia, who is co-ordinating the PR for the hospital campaign, follows her advice by setting out to trap William and marry into a potentially well-heeled family on the prospect of future inheritance from his Aunt Emma, despite his falling hopelessly in love with Len Bartlett's daughter, Kate. After learning from William about his father's extreme right wing views on communists, she uses this as a lever to get the General to take on the job to save them from being over-run by an imaginary left wing inspired revolution.

The conflict arises from the General's escalating rows with Len Bartlett who tries to get him to use a share of the festival takings to finance his marine project and is snubbed when the General remembers him acting as a left-wing barrack room lawyer when he was serving under his command.

Luckily for William, when the General descends on Beddington Hall with his convoy, his ADC, Algy Frobisher, comes to William aid, helping him out of a number of scrapes. Informed about the General's mounting Mess bills, Algy uses this to persuade his CO to support Bartlett's marine venture as a silent partner in the hope that it might unearth a sunken galleon laden with treasure and restore all their fortune and enable William and Kate to get married.

Meanwhile, to boost her daughter's wedding plans, Mrs Muriel Fox Cuddles talks the General into holding a celebration Ball at the Regency Palace to announce the forthcoming event.

To everyone's surprise, the General's aunt turns up to witness the event and lend her support and is fed stories about the Fox Cuddles supposedly impressive lineage. Faced by the threat, Algy saves the day and dashes Lavinia's plans by tricking Aunt Emma into announcing that she is leaving all her worldly goods to animal welfare.

Back home, the General is having a stiff drink to celebrate their escape when he suffers a surprise visit from Mrs Muriel Fox Cuddles who attempts to retrieve the situation. Banking on his help after taking all the problems of the Hospital committee meetings off his shoulders, she warns him in honeyed tones that Lavinia is threatening to bring a case of breach of promise against William. Overhearing the conversation, Aunt Emma burst in to rescue him and shoos the visitor out.

Aware of his secret drinking habits, Aunt Emma locks up the drinks cupboard and questions William about his father's erratic behaviour when his ADC is marooned in hospital after a fall and his supplies are cut off. In an unguarded moment, William lets slip about being tricked into bed with Lavinia despite being in love with Kate and that they cannot afford to get married because both their parents are stony broke.

To his surprise, Aunt Emma is full of sympathy and is girlishly enthusiastic about backing their plans to hunt for buried treasure in partnership with Len Bartlett, using Kate as an intermediary. She encourages them to visit the exploration ship in the harbour to check on what's been planned.

After meeting ship's owner, Captain Borshak, the General succumbs to his unexpected lavish offer of hospitality and William has great difficulty in prising him away after his father becomes tipsy and they discover that their host is extremely left-wing and is open to offers from the highest bidder.

With their immediate plans settled and the drinks cupboard bare thanks to Aunt Emma's strict control, the General decides to remedy the situation by renewing his acquaintance with an old American wartime comrade, Major-General McKintosh, following a chance encounter at the recent Ball celebrations.

After visiting his Uncle in hospital and dismissing his fears that Beddington Hall is not being ruined by the presence of a rampaging horde of billeted soldiers, William decides to make the most of his precious time with Kate before his father returns.

At a hastily arranged picnic the sudden contact of her warm body arouses an urgent longing. After accidentally slipping into a nearby brook and getting them both soaked, she encounters William peeling off his wet clothes at home and the sight of her clinging dress causes him to lose control and reach out for her. Feeling miserable and soaking wet and in urgent need of a hot bath, Kate indignantly repulses him and despite his remorse she refuses to accept his apologies and breaks off their engagement, stumbling away as she fights off her tears.

Meanwhile, on making contact with his old wartime pal, affectionally known as Bugsby, the General is disconcerted to hear that his old friend is about to leave after being summoned back to his base. He makes amends by inviting his friend 'Rodders' to join him as his guest and waving aside the General's half-hearted excuses about deserting his family invites them along as well.

Making the most of his friend's generous offer, the General phones William, passing on the added incentive of getting free flying lessons thrown in and feeling very despondent about his love life, William agrees. Algy, his ADC, takes the opportunity of breaking the news that Aunt Emma has

come across the General's mounting Mess bills and is hastily added to the party to discuss the problem.

Arriving at the base, they are introduced to the training officer, Chuck Malone, who they subsequently discover to be a former boyfriend of Lavinia, who is broken hearted after being turned down in favour of some new unknown rival who he'd love to get his hands on.

At a celebration drinks party, the General gets up unsteadily and waving his hand benevolently almost gives the game away by proposing a toast their treasure hunt. Overbalancing with the effort, he falls flat on his face and has to be helped to his quarters, much to the relief of both William and Algy.

In the morning, the General wakes up with a bleary eye suffering from concussion and fails to remember who is he, and imagines he is back at the time of Castro and the threat of a red inspired revolution. Algy persuades him to have a tranquilising drink and arranges to take him back home as an invalid, confident that Aunt Emma will forget about the mess bills in his present state and urging William to stay behind and keep them in touch with any threatened developments.

Looking forward to the opportunity of free flying lessons in an attempt to forget his lost love life, William readily agrees to give Chuck a hand in the forthcoming fly-past display to commemorate the base's Allied D-day landing celebrations. Despite his reservations, William is thrilled to be given flying lessons and is grateful to Chuck for making it seem so easy.

Explaining his gratitude at the canteen, William is told in confidence about the debt his host owed Chuck during a conversion of an old aircraft hangar when Chuck provided some explosives from his father's oil well to demolish a building and managed to rescue him at a critical moment. Next morning, William is interrupted by Chuck in a thunderous mood telling him that Captain Borshak had made indecent advances on both Lavinia and her mother when they were calling on him to check up on the proposed treasure hunt they'd heard about. Threatening revenge, Chuck mutters about locking up the hangers and leaves William with an uneasy feeling that his friend is talking about the stores hanger they rebuilt and where there might be some charges left over.

Wondering what to do he puts through a call to Algy and unloads his fears. Algy urges him to inform the CO and leave it to him to decide. Torn by divided loyalties on behalf of Chuck who he has grown to like, William stalls and says he will check up and report back. Unable to wait any further, William arms himself with a torch and sneakers and spots Chuck loading a trolley with two slim packages and taking them into the hanger where the Dakota is housed.

Meanwhile, Algy decided to share his concerns. After hearing about the way Lavinia and her mother were treated, Aunt Emma stifles a giggle then rocks with unrestrained laughter, and when she hears about his lavish drinking parties she turns to Algy for an answer. His advice is to get the boat moved out into the bay for safety that would also make it difficult for him to maintain existing supplies of booze, and make the order appear to come from Len Bartlett after explaining the situation to his daughter, Kate.

Woken up by Chuck the next morning sounding stressed, William is told the fly-past has been put forward because of the weather and they are due to take off in under an hour. Climbing into his flying suit, William is strapped up in the open doorway ready to pass out the fireworks that are fitted with timed fuses. Stepping back to inspect, Chuck injures his foot on a box behind him that William recognises as the tail end of the suspect case he'd seen in the stores hanger. Waving aside his questions, Chuck hobbles to the cockpit and manages to take off. On cue, William feed out a

stream of fireworks to the applause of the waiting crowd below and after it is all finished Chuck decides to seek medical help before carrying on.

Relieved at the announcement, William immediately contacts Algy to alert him about the suspect packages. As William wavers, Algy tells him any further delay is critical. When he was told to leave harbour, Borshak had refused and the police had been called in. The boat was a sitting target - every second counts.

Convinced, William asks for the CO and is told he is unavailable, seeing off the VIP's after the fly-past. Before he could decide his next move, Chuck appears before him leaning on a crutch, his foot bound up, looking impatient. Not listening to any argument, Chuck demands, 'Are you with me, or not?'

Faced with the prospect of his friend determined to go ahead and possibly killing himself in the process, William hesitates no longer in the hope of somehow preventing it happening. 'What do you want me to do?' Slapping him on the back, Chuck says he'll explain as they go, and gets William to help him into his seat.

Increasingly concerned at the lack of news, Algy consults Aunt Emma who immediately calls a family council and finds that the General is already at odds with Len Bartlett, despite Kate's efforts to change the conversation. As the exchanges become heated, Aunt Emma interrupts to announce that Lavinia's ex-boyfriend is on his way with a plane load of explosives to take it out on Captain Borshak, for the way he has been treating his guests.

When the news sinks in they are all horrified, particularly when Kate hears that William is involved. Thrusting the others aside, she announces dramatically, 'While you two are arguing, William is up there risking his life to save your necks, doing everything he can to make this place safe for our baby!' After a deathly hush at her announcement, they immediately forget their feuding and rush forward to comfort Kate who gives Algy a wink in passing. To cover their embarrassment, they apologise to each other with extra heartiness and the General puts through an urgent call to the CO to explain the situation.

As they approach their target, Chuck hands over the controls to William. After explaining that he is only aiming to drop it alongside as a lesson, he stumbles to the back of the aircraft and steadies himself at the open doorway. Seeing thin wisps of cloud drifting towards them, William has an idea and shifts the controls slightly. As Chuck received an urgent order to return to base by the CO, William banks the plane slightly away from the target area and heads for the nearest cloud formation like a homing bird.

Seeing a patch of clear water below, William gives a thumbs-up and Chuck heaves the deadly missiles out, damaging his other foot in the process. Unable to move because of the sudden pain, Chuck tells William he is in charge and coaches him in easy steps to start retracing his steps back to base.

As he manages to bank the aircraft around, the clouds part ahead and two slim fighters from the base take up position alongside and signal him to follow. Careful to keep a clear distance from the two escorts, William concentrates on keeping going, to the point when he is just about reaching the limit of endurance when one of the escort plane dips its wings and starts to lose height. After touching down briefly, the Dakota lifts off for a moment and then hits the runway with a thump. Before he can do anything, the dashboard leaps up at him and then all is in darkness.

Coming to, all he can make out is the beaming face of a matron, looking vaguely familiar and greeting him like a hero and revelling at the unexpected publicity the hospital was receiving. She reveals that a top-ranking American General is anxious to have a word, as well as his friend from the plane and a young lady and dozens of others, all queuing up to see him.

Nodding his head, William hitches himself up wondering how he can explain their actions when the burly shape of his father's old friend bounds in and expressing his deep gratitude to William for saving Chuck from making a complete idiot of himself and for managing to land the old Dak without hardly a scratch on her. Looking around cautiously, he added that because of his action, the 'present' he was delivering missed its target by a mile. 'All because of that girl friend of his,' he grins broadly. 'You'll be pleased to know he doesn't need our help any longer. His old man's struck lucky with that oil stake of his – he's got a gusher!'

As soon as he leaves, Chuck pokes his head around the corner and announces proudly that his beloved Lavinia has accepted his proposal and 'she is here to tell you about it herself.' At the sight of William, Lavinia draws herself up haughtily and refuses to recognise him. Her mother echoes her sentiments and they hurry Chuck away, anxious to make the acquaintance of his father and his sudden wealth.

William sinks back gratefully with a sigh of relief, and to crown his happiness the door flies open and Kate throws herself into his arms. Smothering him with kisses, she asks for his forgiveness, adding impishly, 'you'll have to marry me, now I'm having a baby!' After sorting that out, she confides, 'I don't care if they don't find that treasure they keep talking about, as long as we're together.'

Their bliss is interrupted by a tap at the door and Lord Beddington looks in apologetically in his dressing gown, and William realises why the Matron had looked so familiar – he was in St. Mary's Hospital. 'Seeing as you're just down the corridor, I thought you might like to hear the latest news.' Breaking the glad tidings, he tells them that the bombs William dropped managed to dislodge an old shipwreck full of treasure and it all got washed up in his bay, 'so they're saying, I'm entitled to claim ownership.' As the news sank in, he explains that according to some papers they found, it was given to his ancestors for their sterling work in fighting the Spaniards and bringing back hordes of captured bounty.

He thought about it a bit. 'I suppose that means I'm a rich man, funny that.' Accepting their congratulations, he decides to back the marina project to delighted squeals from Kate and beams, 'If it hadn't been for you, I'd still be up to my ears in debt. Gazing at William fondly, he added, 'As soon as I get my hands on the money, I'm going to make you my heir and share half the proceeds with you. How about that for starters?'

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