

= Checkmate ( 1911 film ) =

Checkmate is a 1911 American silent short drama film produced by the Thanhouser Company . Focusing on the subject of convictions by circumstantial evidence , the plot has a French baron and an American businessman vie for the affections of an heiress . She chooses the American and the French baron conspires with the heiress 's aunt to take revenge . The American falls into their trap and is accused of stabbing the baron by the conspirators . The circumstantial evidence was enough to convict him and he is sent to prison . Through the aid of a homeless doppelgänger who looks like the fiancé , he is substituted in prison and the original forces a confession from the aunt . For his plot , the baron is convicted of perjury and sent to prison . Released on February 17 , 1911 , the film was a critical failure for its improbable plot and its prison substitution scene . The film is presumed lost .

= = Plot = =

The film focuses on a young heiress who has two suitors , one a French baron and the other an American businessman named Jack . Her aunt , who favors the French noble out her desire for status , is hurt to learn that the heiress has chosen to marry the American businessman . The baron vows revenge and schemes with the aunt to aid his plot . When the businessman comes to the house to see his fiancée , he learns that she is out of the house and sits down with the baron and aunt . Moments later , the servant rushes into the room attracted by cries to see Jack bending over the wounded baron with a knife in hand . Both the aunt and the baron accuse him of the stabbing as well as the servant and a policeman , who also saw Jack with the knife . In court , the jury finds it to be a clear case and Jack is sentenced to ten years in prison .

His fiancée is determined to prove his innocence , but knows not how to establish it . She meets a homeless man , who closely resembles Jack , who is about to commit a crime by smashing a window . The man desires to go to prison , believing it to be the only way that he will have food and shelter . The girl recognizes the opportunity and plans to pay him for taking the place of her fiancée in prison . The man consents and the heiress concocts a clever substitution that proves successful via change of clothes . Jack , now free , confronts the aunt ? who believes that his reappearance is a ghostly one . The aunt confesses that the baron 's wounds were self @-@ inflicted and the circumstantial evidence that the servant and policeman had seen was an erroneous . The substitute convict is pardoned and released from prison without the swap ever being known . For his plot , the French baron is convicted for perjury and sent to the state prison .

= = Production = =

The only known credit for the film is that it starred William Garwood . Film historian , Q. David Bowers notes that the plot dealing with circumstantial evidence focused on one of Lloyd Lonergan 's social issues . Lonergan would produce several scenarios featuring the problems with circumstantial evidence being used to obtain convictions . Bowers notes that such convictions were a known social issue , but not a pressing one in 1911 . The first such Thanhouser film to tackle the subject was Love and Law released in December 1910 . Love and Law was a film which garnered some criticism for an improbable plot . Checkmate wove a more tangled web of circumstantial evidence and intrigue and the resolution comes not from an astute female detective , but by the heiress 's novel substitution of a doppelgänger to the prison so that the original can get the needed confession . The serious nature of the film was highlighted with the advertising of the film by Thanhouser which states , " Checkmate carries a message and a lesson to those who value the ' circumstantial evidence ' process by which so many convictions are obtained in our criminal courts . The reel demonstrates how easily evidence of this sort may be made to entangle and ensnare a totally innocent man ... "

= = Release and reception = =

The single reel drama , approximately 1 @, @ 000 feet long , was released on February 17 , 1911 . The film was met with a wide variety of reviews by critics ; with the majority proving to be negative . The Morning Telegraph , like others , found the story to be foolish and completely improbable on many accounts . While the reviewer stated that no magistrate would have sent the man to jail for assault with a blunt knife , it was the jail substitution via a changing of clothes which proved to be impossible . H. Jeanval of The Moving Picture News found the baron to be boorish by shading a lady 's hand with a glove on and wondered at how Thanhouser was able to film the prison scenes . Walton , also of The Moving Picture News summed up the film and stated , " Good teaching as to woman 's ' class ' , but as to details [ , ] sadly lax . " The New York Dramatic Mirror panned the film beginning with , " Nothing more improbable or inconsistent has been seen on the screen in some time ... " The reviewer concluded the review of the improbable plot as to having been " dreamed up by a ten @-@ year @-@ old girl . "

The film is presumed lost because the film is not known to be held in any archive or by any collector .