

# THE CLOUDED MOON

By MAX SALTSMARSH

**The Characters**  
Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera. Archie Lumsden, myself, Hugo's friend. René Geiss, a singularly unpleasant cartoonist.

Yesterday, I hire a French boy, Jean-François, to investigate Geiss. He tells me Geiss's car was out of the garage at the time of the murders.

### Chapter Eight

#### The Inquiry Begins

MARCHED into the living-room. "Hugo," I said "I've now the proud possessors of a press-agent. And," I continued, feeling I might as well be hanged for a sheep as a goat, "I've been and had my picture took."

"He gave me a stifled groan. "Go on," he said. "After that I can bear anything. Tell me the worst—were you wearing your lavender negligee or your beach pajamas?"

I had been extremely uneasy as to how he would react to my recent activities, but as I unfolded them I saw, with considerable relief, that a reluctant grin was stealing over his face.

"Well, well," said he as I finished. "I think you're daff, but I can't deny that the bit of news about Geiss is most refreshing. Our dream is taking a semblance of reality."

He got to his feet and paced the long room, which was filled now with a pleasant green half-light filtering through the closed shutters. "The fellow can't have committed the murder himself," he broke out at last, coming to a sudden halt in front of me. "He quite definitely wasn't there, and if he did what I suppose we're both thinking and assisting in the murder—his get-away he might be even madder than I took him for. It can't be that, Archie. The man's got a lunatic intelligence of his own—he's brilliant in his distorted fashion; he'd never make a slip like that."

"Unless," I suggested, "he had to act so quickly that there was no time for precaution. Suppose he suspected that the girl knew something damaging about him, but wasn't sure, and then suddenly discovered that she not only had the knowledge, but intended to act on it right away? He wouldn't have time to work out a plan of campaign or think about covering up his tracks. He'd have to act damn quick. But as no one appears to have so much as seen the murderer's face, and we don't know his name or where he's skipped off to, I don't see how we can hope to prove his connection with Geiss."

Hugo nodded. "Incoherent," he commented, "but sound. I'd suggest that we begin our investigations back side foremost—induction in preference to deduction—and, starting from the premise that Geiss arranged the two murders, try to find out why he did so. Come on, Archie. It's time we were facing the music."

He led the way through the hall to the courtyard, where his black Hispano basked sleepily in the sun. We got in and he turned the Hispano's nose towards the town. He took her at a spanking sixty miles an hour along the deserted esplanade, pulling up round the bend at a little café on the water-front.

"That's the Hôtel de Ville," he told me, pointing across the cluttering masts to an imposing edifice facing the harbor; "now for the high jump." And as he led the way round the cobble-paved quay he added: "Have your handkerchief ready if you want to preserve the copyright on your face."

It was a timely warning. As we made a dive through the archway, our faces muffled, I heard the clicking of cameras. But I saw no sign of Jean-François Lubeac, and I registered a prayer that he had found other and better fish to fry.

A military-looking sergeant de ville led us up a stairway to a big bare room on the first floor where ranged on wooden chairs around the wall and looking strangely like the patients in a dentist's waiting-room, I saw a number of familiar faces and a few that I did not know. The manager of Palm Beach was there, chatting with a distinguished-looking man in a lavender silk shirt and white trousers who mopped his forehead every other minute with a vast orange handkerchief. And then, as I looked at Hugo's bow to the assembled company and looked round me for a chair, I saw at the far end of the room, leaning with an elegant detachment against a battered iron stove, Geiss himself.

"He Means Mischief!" HE HAD the air of being completely oblivious of his surroundings, but as we seated ourselves he recognized us with a welcoming smile and came across the floor.

"My friends!" he said, looking from one to the other of us with his head cocked on one side like a dispirited fowl. "You are, I hope, still my friends—even after last night? I am—sorry! I lost my temper. But you must not do it again! You must not joke about my little aspirations! They are a funny joke to you, but to me they are part of that dream world in which every great artist lives—that world which is so much more real than reality. I tell you, I slept not a wink last night, thinking of what you had said, and if I had tried to work today, I should have been very angry with you, for the inspiration would have been wanting. But as it is, I forgive you, for this morning we are all—artists, writers, commoners, we are all servants of the State, giving what help we can. Is it not so?"

Hugo inclined his head. "Today even the least of mortals is the equal of René Geiss—in the sight of the State," he agreed solemnly. "Though I'm afraid that what you or I or Archie here have to tell won't be of much help."

He ended on a note of query, and the cartoonist gave him a quick look. Expressionless as usual his face was, there was nevertheless something fairly derisive in the curl of his mouth.

"For myself, that is so," he answered, and spread out his hands. "What, after all, do I care? I was not there. I saw nothing! But you, my dear Hugo, and your large young friend—I fancy you will find that the examining magistrate relies much on what you can tell him."

He turned his opaque eyes on me. "And you at least," he added softly, "mon cher ami, have the satisfaction of being the hero of the hour. You will pardon me, I hear my name called—I must go." He turned away to where the sergeant de ville was beckoning him through a half-open door into an inner room.

I leaned towards Hugo. "That man means mischief," I said under my breath, and saw him nod. "He can't do much," he said doubtfully, "but he's a man of consequence and he knows the judge well, so watch your step, and if you're feeling that we were a trifle unwise in showing our hands so clearly last night."

I was so entirely in agreement with him that I found nothing to say, and it was in a rather apprehensive silence that we sat watching the hands of the big clock slowly move on.

They had traveled as far as the half-hour when the inner door opened again, and every eye in the room turned instinctively towards it. The sergeant appeared in the opening, "Monsieur le Baron Stahl!" he called incisively, and to my amazement the small fat man to whom Mme. Stefan had been talking got to his feet and scurried across the floor like a frightened, unwieldy rabbit.

"Your Story, Please" HE WAS a dark-skinned, swarthy little fellow, who looked as if he would have been at home in the dish-washing department of some Soho restaurant. He was dressed in the height of Riviera fashion, but the white uniform and cap he wore, and his great paunch unmercifully, and the white enamel shirt opened inconspicuously over his hairy chest.

"If that's a great financier, I'm a Turk!" I whispered to Hugo, but got no answer. "He's a badly frightened one, at all events," he whispered back. "Archie, I'd give my hope of salvation and half my American royalties to know what he's telling me in there!"

The next moment the door opened a third time and I heard my name called. I got to my feet, and I stepped into the inner sanctum. It was a middling-sized room, and at first glance it seemed full of people. Behind a vast desk in the middle of the floor sat a small, gray man, so thin that he looked like a bundle of matchsticks tightly buttoned into an official frock coat, but with a pair of uncommonly sharp blue eyes. The commissaire of police sat beside him, and at a table in the corner a little fellow like a lawyer's clerk scribbled furiously on some foolscap. A uniformed gendarme stood by a door in the background, through which I imagined Baron Stahl must recently have made his exit, and beside him three men in civilian clothes gossiped in low voices, but at my entry they broke off and eyed me curiously. I realized that I was in the presence of the famous paragon, the court of the examining magistrate.

The commissaire got ponderous, for he flapped a fat white hand in my direction, and named me. "Monsieur le juge, this is Mr. Lumsden." The juge watched me as I settled myself and then leaned forward, his elbows on the table.

"And now, monsieur," he said in a dry, brittle voice, "the cracking of twigs we will have your story, if you please. It will be easier, I think, if you will tell it in your own words from the beginning. You know what we desire to hear."

It certainly suited me better to tell my own tale and I took it slowly, choosing my words as carefully as I could, for though my French is adequate, it could not be described as first-class, and I was mortally afraid of saying something that would not tally with the tale they would presently hear from Hugo. He heard me to the end in silence, making no comment and putting no questions, a fact that, after a time, I found slightly disturbing; and when I had finished he sat for a good minute in silence, staring at me out of those beady eyes with an expression that I didn't altogether like.

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Tomorrow: Under suspicion.

In Portland and serve Oregon and Washington.

The federal power commission denied them the right to consolidate and the companies filed petitions for review with the circuit court and the power commission entered a motion to dismiss the power companies' petitions.

In a ruling, the court affirmed its right to review, set aside and remanded the cases to the commission for reconsideration as to points of law.

## STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

ONE CHOLERA BACILLUS, UNDER FAVORABLE CONDITIONS, COULD IN A SINGLE DAY PRODUCE 5,000,000,000,000,000,000 BACTERIA--WEIGHING 7366 TONS!

A 400-POUND SEAL FLIPPED 3 MILES INLAND FROM SAN FRANCISCO BAY--AND BACK!  
-Jan., 1938-

THE SWINE SONG-- A PIG WAS TRAINED TO RING A PEAL OF BELLS! -England, 1938-

THE BLIND POSTMAN! OWEN JONES, FIRST POSTMAN OF BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH, NEVER SAW BRIGHAM CITY--YET FOR 25 YEARS CARRIED MAIL THERE UNASSISTED AND ACTED AS UNOFFICIAL CITY GUIDE! -19th century-

The Blind Postman Strange as it seems, Brigham City, Utah, had for its first postman a blind man who had never in his life had a glimpse of the town. Born a Welshman in the year 1818, Jones came to America in 1849 and Utah in 1852, settling in Brigham soon after his arrival. He never saw America, as he had lost one eye as a child, the other in a Welsh slate factory accident. By dint of his hands, Jones can duplicate itself every 20 minutes, scientists claim. Thus, in a single day, one "parent" bacillus, under per-

fect conditions, might become 5,000,000,000,000,000,000, weighing 7,366 tons. "In a few weeks at this rate," says Dr. Ronald Macfie there would be a mass of bacteria huge enough to fill the Atlantic ocean." Strange as it seems, the reproductive potentialities of all the microbes in a single glass of sour milk are such that, if allowed to go on multiplying for five days, they would form a living mass larger than the earth. Tomorrow: The text-book crew coach!

Klamath Indian reservation timber, comprising the Crooked creek unit, with a high bid of \$8.17 a thousand feet, Reservation Superintendent B. G. Courtwright announced.

Highwaymen Take Payroll Pouches SHOWLOW, Ariz., Sept. 8.—(AP)—Two masked highwaymen held up a mail truck at Bull Hollow, 10 miles north of Taylor, Ariz., today and escaped with two payroll pouches, one of which contained \$21,000. The pouches contained funds for payroll of the Southwest Lumber mills at McNary and a logging camp at White River. Amount of the White River payroll was not immediately determined. Driver of the truck, a man named Ison, said the holdup men parked across the highway at a narrow spot where it dips down into Bull Hollow canyon, forcing him to stop. Ison was alone.

Favor School Project McMinnville, Sept. 8.—(AP)—A \$149,800 high school modernization and construction program was favored yesterday by voters who approved a \$50,000 bond and a \$92,800 warrant issue to pay school district costs and match PWA funds. Phone 542 We'll mail away your refuse. City Sanitary Service

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Tommy Scorns the Threat!

ONE OF THE TWO GANGSTERS, WHO WERE TALKING WITH BEN SHOOT THE OTHER DAY, GAVE JERRY A NOTE TO DELIVER TO TOMMY THE NOTE THREATENED TOMMY WITH DEATH BY A SILENCER BULLET THE INSTANT HE STEPS OUT OF HIS PLANE, SHOULD HE WIN THE BENDIX RACE!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Results!

IF EVER A PLACE SAW A STRANGE SAMPLING CAMPAIGN IT WAS THE LITTLE TOWN OF WHIPPOORWILL HOLLOW--BUT LET'S HAVES DROP OVER A FEW BACK FENCES, BEHIND HOMES ALREADY VISITED BY BEN AND RUSTY!

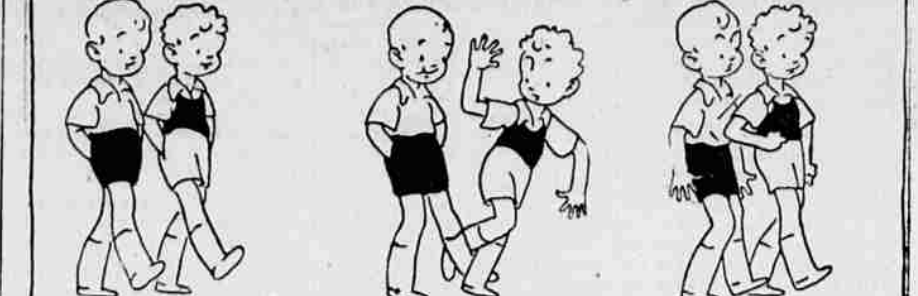
THE NEBBS—Harmony

MOTHAM, I'M FED UP ON THIS PLACE--IT'S NO PLACE FOR A YOUNG GIRL--POSITIVELY NOTHING TO DO!

AGREE TO REVIEW UTILITY MERGER

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 8.—(AP)—The U. S. circuit court of appeals ruled today it would review the case of the Pacific Light and Power company and the Inland Power and Light company, whose request to merge was denied by the federal power commission. The companies have headquarters

## STROLLING By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAKES A STROLL ROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH BUD'S BEMIS TO SEE WHAT'S DOING

LIVENS THINGS UP BY THRUSTING FOOT BETWEEN BUD'S LEGS, TRIPPING HIM NEARLY

A MOMENT LATER IN AN UNSUSPECTING MOMENT GETS A SMART BLOW FROM BUD'S ELBOW IN THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH



STROLL TURNS INTO A SORT OF MARATHON OF PUSHING, TRIPPING, SHOVING WITH OCCASIONAL PUNCHES

GET TIRED OF CHASING EACH OTHER, AND BOTH GO DOWN, WRESTLING

RETURN HOME AT LAST, AGREEING THAT THERE IS NOTHING DOING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD BUT THAT THEY HAD A NICE STROLL

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## S'MATTER POI By O M PAYNE



YIPPEE-EE! 'TIS I, DESPERATE AMBROSE, THE BUCKAROO! IS ANYBODY HOME?

DOOM!



S'MATTER?

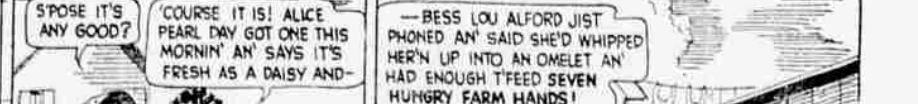
MAW!

DID I HEAR YOU CALL FOR YOUR FOLKS?

GIMME! A SECOND! I WANTA FIGGER OUT SUMTHIN'

By HAL FORREST

## BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Results!



WHAT'S TH' MATTER, TOM?

I THINK I DO

JUST ANOTHER ATTEMPT BY THE COMET CROWD TO STEAL THE BENDIX TROPHY--BUT IT WON'T WORK!

By EDWIN ALGER

## THE NEBBS—Harmony



OH, YOU GOT ONE!

DEED I DID!

By SOL HEP\*