

THE CLOUDBREAKER

By MAX SALTmarsh

The Characters
Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera.
Archie Lumsden, myself, Hugo's friend.

Yesterday: Dunning is telling us about "the big swindle." The deaths of prominent men were predicted in an astrological magazine, and insurance collected all over the world when the deaths occurred.

Chapter 19
Marked For Murder!

THE insurance man from Lloyd's, Dunning continued, immediately bought a copy of the Grimoire as "insurance for the nervous year."

There, set out in smudgy type and with the flowery and fantastic verbiage which the writer affected, were four predictions which made his skin tingle and his heart beat perceptibly quicker, for they foretold, with a remarkable precision of detail, the sudden deaths of four eminent gentlemen who had met their ends in the previous year.

The Grimire has been published in January. The deaths had occurred in the following March, May, August, and November. Mr. Pickett was a level-headed man. He still refused to believe in the predictive powers of astrology, but instead a very curious and sinister idea occurred to him—namely, that these deaths and the resultant highly profitable insurance claims, had been engineered by some person or persons, and that one of them, with a distorted sense of humor, was amusing himself by announcing them in advance through the medium of the Grimoire.

His holiday was nearly at an end. He found time to visit Nico and inspect the small printing establishment where the Grimoire saw the light each first of January, but the proprietor, while admitting the publication and marketing of the precious production, absolutely and completely refused to disclose the name of the client who was responsible for it. There was nothing more to be done. If he told his suspicions to the local police, they would laugh at him; if he asked for help in tracing the mysterious astrologer, they would show him the door. He went home.

Back in London he postulated his theory to a colleague from the Bureau Veritas, and found to his amazement, that he was being lauded seriously. The guest's Gallic imagination was fired, he asked a variety of pertinent questions, suggested a detail or two to round off the picture, and returned to Paris promising further discussion at an early date.

Here Mr. Dunning paused to look regretfully at his empty glass, and Hugo promptly refilled it. The next chapter of the story opened, he said, with the visit to Paris of a representative of the American Bureau, to whom Mr. Pickett's friend mentioned the theory which he had advanced with as firm an air as it had the Englishman's. The visitor, whose pocket had been severely depleted by the demise of the South American President, listened, was impressed, and, with the energy of a man, insisted on immediate action. After that, said Mr. Dunning, things began to hum.

Meetings were held of representatives of the three great clearing-houses, as a result of which it was decided that investigation was justified, and it was agreed to employ some reliable firm to carry out inquiries. In the end—and here Mr. Dunning swelled with justifiable pride—his organization was chosen, and the first thing that he was able to bring to light was the fact that behind the mysterious insurances on the two most recent deaths loomed large the figures of three men; they were, in short, the source of the capital which had furnished the original premiums—Stahl, Venner and Rakovsky.

One Controlling Brain

THE existence of the Big Swindle was now established, and Dunning's agency was empowered to go full speed ahead, with all the financial backing that was required; but for the moment the scent seemed to have petered out. Only one fact began to emerge. Behind all these individuals and the groups that directed them, there must be one controlling personality, one brain that plotted and schemed, that evolved the plans not only for the money-making side of the business, but for the organized crime that made such profit-making possible.

It must be, he surmised, a man of brilliant intellect, with international social connections that kept him informed in advance of the movements of prominent personages in a number of countries, and of the political and financial conditions in these same countries; but it must furthermore be a man who owed neither physical nor spiritual allegiance to any established order, a man of warped morals and twisted mentality, and one, moreover, whose vanity was such that he judged all means justified to achieve the end of his personal enrichment. So much he could envisage without difficulty, but when it came to picking the individual, he was completely stuck.

"Gee!" said Hugo and I with one accord.
Dunning nodded slowly. "In the

light of the events of the past two days," he admitted, "possibly so."
But surely, I suggested, "the quickest way to locate the person would have been through the fellow who printed the Grimoire?"

He beamed at me. "Son," he drawled, "the investigation was placed in my hands one year ago, and it took me just three months to reach that conclusion; but, mind you, I'd had a lot of ground to cover before I got there! I sailed for France in November, I got to Nice and paid an informal call on the printer's, only to discover that he had expired three months earlier from heart-failure. Heart-failure is a convenient complaint. The fact that the gentleman had expired at the very moment that the investigation had been decided on might give one something to think about, but didn't help any in tracing the author of the Grimoire. It remained for me to wait until the first of January and see if it appeared as usual."

"But the police," said Hugo impatiently—"surely by that time you had called in the Surete?"
Mr. Dunning favored us with a wink. "There are occasions when a man's actions are considerably freer if he remains outside the law, and particularly the French law. The gentleman known as Vladimir Rakovsky, who was one of the three behind the previous year's insurances, has friends in high places in Paris; you might call him a second Stavisky on a smaller scale; and he'd have smelled out any inquiry involving himself quicker than you'd smell a skunk. I therefore continued to pursue my investigation independently, and on the first of January the Grimoire appeared."

Death in August

HE paused dramatically. "The Grimoire appeared as usual, but under no imprint of publisher or printer, and subsequent inquiries elicited the fact that it had been hawked round the news agencies by an unknown individual, whom I have been unable to trace. He was a tall fellow, I am told, shabby, downcast, down-at-the-heel, down and out. Dirt-color all over and a dirty soul."

He fumbled in his pocket and extracted a shabby, crumpled leaflet. "Here we are," said he, opening it and adjusting a pair of shell-rimmed glasses on his nose. The predictions for the month of August, advertisements were carried in the previous issues, but you will perceive, in this one, from which I argue the use of a private printing-press. The author is not risking the disclosure of his identity."

He walked across and peered over his shoulder. The paper and printing were of the cheapest, and the top of the page was ornamented with a vividly executed drawing of a goat.

The month of August, it remained encouragingly, would witness some of the most dramatic in the history of France, for strikes, civil disturbances, epidemics, all would take their toll of the unhappy population.

Sadistic crimes, it ran, would be rampant and finally, towards the end of the month, a comet would shatter the very foundations of international relations. A prominent American Financier, honored and respected at home and abroad, would meet a sudden and dreadful end while vacationing on the Riviera. The assassin would, unfortunately, make good his escape, and public opinion in the United States would be profoundly stirred.

The fact that he was negotiating a merger with certain prominent French banking houses was not overlooked by the assassins, and his sudden demise would undoubtedly create a panic in the money-markets of the world.

Hugo by my side had been reading word for word with me, while Ottilie Willa, perched on the opposite arm of Dunning's chair, watched our faces anxiously.

"You see?" she broke out, a trifle breathlessly, as we came to the end. "It's Uncle Virgoe—it could be no one else. There's no one like him in American finance at the moment. But—" She ran her fingers through her chestnut curls with an almost comical effect of bewilderment—"that merger! It was only suggested last fall, and nothing appeared about it in the papers till late spring. Uncle Virgoe's been fighting for it tooth and nail—but someone must have got wind of it."

"Vladimir Rakovsky, I imagine?" Hugo suggested dryly, and Dunning nodded.
He got to his feet and faced us, an unwieldy but somehow commanding figure. "That gentleman has powerful connections, as I told you. He has his finger on the pulse of this country's political and financial arteries. No, sir!" He stretched himself, lifting his shoulders and swelling out his great chest. "I'm not puffing any as to how that information seeped through; but I'm not near the end of my story. When I had read, digested, and absorbed that highly informative paragraph, I proceeded to give a careful scrutiny to the rest of the publication, and from that scrutiny, as very significant fact emerged. Throughout the predictions for the year, there was no forecast of any other sudden death."

I whistled softly. "They were afraid?"
"Precisely!" he said.
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Tomorrow: A plan of campaign.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



A TOY TRAIN RUNNING ON A CIRCULAR TRACK AT HIGH SPEED WAS USED BY M. W. BALDWIN, INVENTOR, TO DEMONSTRATE THE FEASIBILITY OF FLANGED WHEELS FOR RAILROAD CARRIAGES... Philadelphia Museum, 1831-

EVERY AMERICAN LEAGUE BASEBALL GAME PLAYED ON JULY 24, 1937, ENDED WITH THE SAME SCORE-- 6 TO 5!



McNigh Syndicate, Inc. 9-24-38



"FIRST LADY" OF THE SENATE! HATTIE CARAWAY, ARKANSAS LEGISLATOR AND FIRST WOMAN SENIOR SENATOR IN U.S. HISTORY, ALSO IS THE FIRST WOMAN ELECTED TO THE SENATE BY POPULAR VOTE; FIRST WOMAN CHAIRMAN OF A SENATE COMMITTEE; FIRST WOMAN TO CONDUCT A SENATE HEARING; AND FIRST WOMAN TO PRESIDE OVER THE SENATE!

Senate First Lady
When last July the death of Senate Majority Leader Joseph T. Robinson vacated the seat of senior senator from Arkansas, Junior Senator Hattie Caraway was elevated to fill that post.

She became, in this manner, the first woman in United States history to serve any state as its senior senator, scoring her fifth "first" among the nation's past and present women senators.

On the death of her husband in 1931, Mrs. Caraway was chosen to fill his seat as senator from Arkansas. Thus she became the first woman ever elected to the senate by popular vote.

Other firsts of Senator Caraway include: first woman chairman of a senate committee; first woman to conduct a senate hearing; and first woman ever to preside over the senate.

Toy Train Test
Strange as it seems, a toy train was utilized in 1831 to allay the fears of the public that passenger cars could not stay on the track when negotiating curves at ordinarily high speeds.

Matthias W. Baldwin, Philadelphia jeweler and railroad engine builder, in April, 1831, set up a small circular track in the Philadelphia museum. He constructed a model engine and four cars, all equipped with the flanged wheels commonly in use.

Then, while crowds watched fascinated, the tiny train sped around and around, clinging tenaciously to the track. The experiment worked; the public voted its confidence in the toy train.

Tomorrow: The bedbug that sold for \$10.

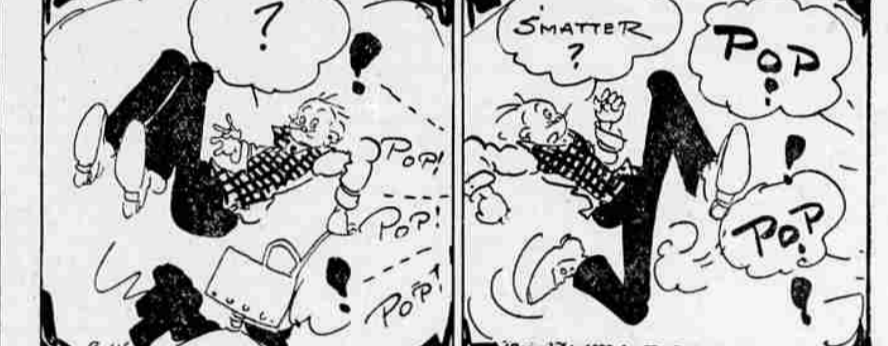
SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

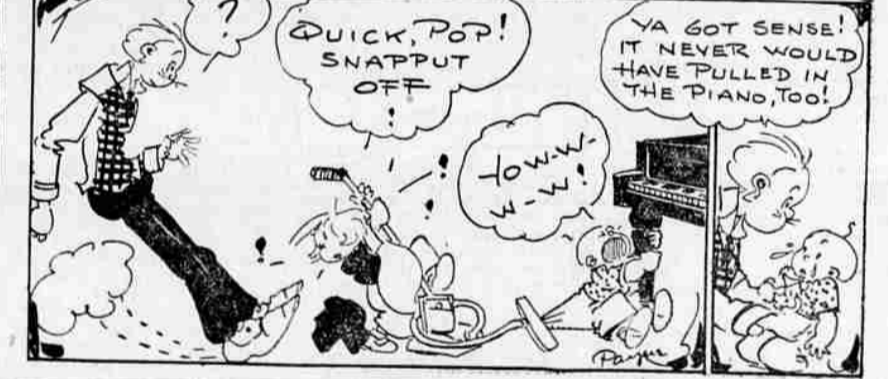


THE ENTERTAINMENT AT THE MONTHLY CLUB MEETING AT MRS. PLUMER'S HAD TO BE CALLED OFF, BECAUSE EACH TIME THE SINGER BEGAN, THE NEW BABY NEXT DOOR BEGAN TOO, AND THE BABY PROVED TO HAVE SUPERIOR LUNG POWER. (Copyright, 1938, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.) 9-20

SMATTER PO! By C M PAYNE



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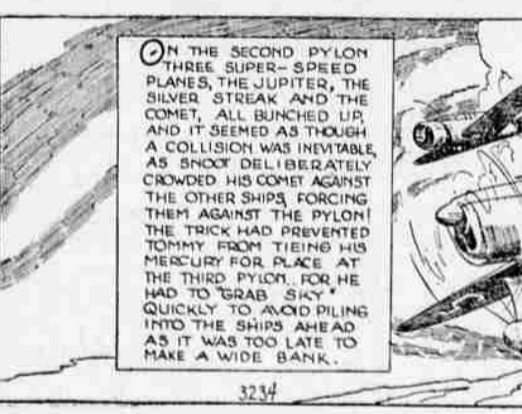
YA GOT SENSE! IT NEVER WOULD HAVE PULLED IN THE PIANO, TOO!

By HAL FORREST

Deny Stop-go Light
PORTLAND, Sept. 21.—(AP)—Portland's request for installation of stop-go lights was denied by the state highway commission at a meeting here last night.

Gym Vote Held
THE DALLES, Sept. 21.—(AP)—Qualified voters in school district No. 12, comprising The Dalles and environs, voted today on the construction of a \$105,000 school gymnasium.
Tree Sprouts In Auto
HOLLAND, Mich. (UP)—A car has sprouted a seedling tree here. A seed lodged in the crack between the front fender and the body and took root there. The owner of the car, believe it or not, is C. E. Ripley.
Lauds Sewage Plant.
PORTLAND, Sept. 21.—(AP)—Portland's sewage disposal plant was described as an "ideal WPA project" by Harry L. Hopkins, national WPA chief, yesterday.
Watkins Glens, N. Y. (UP)—Charles Haight is the proud owner of a letter from Hell, Haight, a philatelist, mailed a letter to the postmaster of Hell, Norway. The postmaster cancelled it and sent it back.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Dirty Work . . . At the Palms Pylon!



ON THE SECOND PYLON THREE SUPER-SPEED PLANES, THE JUPITER, THE SILVER STREAK AND THE COMET, ALL BUNCHED UP, AND IT SEEMED AS THOUGH A COLLISION WAS INEVITABLE AS SMOOT DELIBERATELY CROWDED HIS COMET AGAINST THE OTHER SHIPS, FORCING THEM AGAINST THE PYLON! THE TRICK HAD PREVENTED TOMMY FROM TIEING HIS MERCURY FOR PLACE AT THE THIRD PYLON, FOR HE HAD TO GRAB SINK QUICKLY TO AVOID PILING INTO THE SHIPS AHEAD AS IT WAS TOO LATE TO MAKE A WIDE BANK.



THAT ELIMINATES THE BULLET! AND PUTS ME IN THIRD PLACE!



THAT LOOKS LIKE DIRTY FLYING TO ME!



LOOK! THE COMET IS TRYING TO PILE THE JUPITER INTO ITS SLIP-STREAM!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Prof. A. A. Adit



AS YOU SEE BY MY CARD, YOUNG MAN, I AM PROF. A. A. ADIT—



AND I HAVE BEEN SENT HERE BY THE GOVERNMENT TO INQUIRE INTO YOUR POULTRY METHODS—



GEE, PROF. ADIT, I'M AFRAID I CAN'T TELL YOU VERY MUCH—Y'SEE, OUR METHODS ARE SECRET—



NEVER BE HASTY ABOUT KEEPING ANYTHING SECRET FROM THE GOVERNMENT! DO I MAKE MYSELF PLAIN? WHY, ER, YES, I GUESS SO!

THE NEBBS—Good Deed Steve



TIME HAS NOT HEALED THE ACHE IN STEVE'S HEART... HE NOW SEEKS SOLACE IN PERFORMANCE OF KIND DEEDS



GOOD MORNING, BROTHER STEVE, CHEER UP. NOTHING IS AS BAD AS YOU LOOK... SOMEONE ELSE AS NICE AS NELLIE WILL COME ALONG AND THEN YOU CAN STILL PARTAKE OF THE TROUBLES OF MARRIAGE!



I AM TRYING TO THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE... I'M GOING OVER TO THE BANKER AND PICK UP THE MORTGAGE ON THIS HOTEL—



NO! NO! STEVE, I COULDN'T EXPECT THAT FROM YOU... IT'S TOO MUCH. NOTHING IS TOO MUCH, BROTHER—I GOT A LOT OF MONEY AND IT AIN'T MAKING ME HAPPY SO I'M GON TO DO SOMETHING GOOD WITH IT!

By SOL HESS

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HUNGARY, POLAND AIDES IN PARLEY

BERCHTESGADEN, Germany, Sept. 21.—(AP)—Envoys of Hungary and Poland met today in Berchtesgaden to discuss the Czechoslovak crisis.