

THE CLOUDE MOON

By MAX SALTSMARSH

The Characters

Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera.
 Archie Lumsden, myself, Hugo's friend.
 Otilie Wills, beautiful American heiress.

Yesterday in the astrological magazine, the death of Virgo Wills is predicted for late August. We think Geis is the brain behind the suicide.

Chapter 20

August 30th Is The Date

I CAME to two conclusions, Dunning went on. "First, that by some means, the conspirators had stumbled to the fact that we were on their trail, and second, that before liquidating their gains and scattering to the four corners of the earth, they had settled to close with one large, spectacular raffle-off, and for their burnt-offering had selected Mr. Virgo Wills. The fact that I was personally acquainted with Mr. Wills and his two nieces had doubtless escaped their notice."

"It also occurred to me that the head of the whole concern was publishing his interesting little forecasts without the knowledge of his subordinates and partners in crime. Well, friends, just as soon as I had finished my thinking, I got busy. My first step was to send out a string of cables to my assistants, instructing them to get on the trail of any insurance policies on the life of Mr. Virgo Wills; my second was to pack my bags and head for New York. I landed in New York and had an instructive interview with Miss Otilie Wills."

He broke off and laid a large, white paw on the girl's shoulder. "You'll forgive me, honey," said he, "but I'm obliged to say this. Gentlemen, you must understand that there was a vast difference in the mentality of the two sisters. Where Melanie was scatter-brained, impulsive, and erratic Otilie is as level-headed as a man. It was therefore to her I turned. I knew about Melanie's disappearance, for Pat was one of my own men, but right away Otilie gave me another vital item of information, she told me that her uncle had planned, last fall, to pay a visit this summer to the south of France."

The girl stood up and linked her arm in his. "You're beginning to see," she asked eagerly, and Hugo nodded. "I fancy," said he, "that you and Mr. Dunning then decided to inform your uncle of what was going on and to persuade him to cancel his trip to Europe?"

She looked at him with an odd little smile. "You're every bit as intelligent as I thought you were!" she said. "I told Sis first, and then Cuthbert here tackled Uncle and begged him to give up the idea of the trip. But he's very strong-minded and he hates to have his personal safety fussed over, and he just wouldn't listen to any of us. Cuthbert, by this time, had found out that heavy insurance policies were being taken out against the chance of anything happening to Uncle while he was in France—heavy than ever before—and that made Sis and me crazy with nervousness. It was she, said she couldn't stand the strain any longer and went away as we thought, to California. Two weeks after she'd gone, Baron Stahl arrived in New York, and I began to meet him socially."

Hugo took a pace or two up and down the room. "I wondered about that," he said abruptly. "So Stahl never met your sister in America, and the chances are he wouldn't recognize her when he saw her here. He'd accept her as Eve Monet."

"I suppose," I added, "that he went to New York for the purpose of making your uncle's acquaintance?"

She nodded again. "Yes," she said eagerly, "and that's why I had the fright of my life when I met him first; but it was nothing, to the scare I had when he showed up at Antibes, the evening we arrived. Cuthbert had told us, you see, what he and the other two, Verner and Rakovsky, had been doing. I guess that was the idea in Sis's mind—to come over to Europe and make acquaintance with the three of them, hoping the trail would lead her to their chief."

'Not Easy To Handle'

AND the trail, said Hugo gravely, led her, we must suppose, to Geis. What does your uncle say to Stahl's turning up here? It must be obvious to him that the fellow's paving the way in some fashion for the attempt on his life."

She threw out her hands. "He says it's all poney-cock, moonshine, and if I talk him about it again he'll send me packing back home."

"Not an easy relative to handle," commented Hugo dryly. "Dunning, what's your idea of the business?"

The big man shrugged. "I'm waiting to hear your end of the story, Mr. Stern. I'm still all in the dark as to how you and Mr. Lumsden got mixed up in this."

As clearly as I could I told him the events of the last fifty hours.

When I had finished, Hugo said: "Isn't it time we discussed something concrete—a plan of campaign? I take it, we are to accept the 30th as the date fixed for Mr. Wills's assassination? There should be some reason for arbitrarily choosing the day. Normally, I imagine killers make their preparations and then wait until

a suitable opportunity, less, of course, there's some special function fixed for that day that would make their task easy. Miss Wills, has your uncle any public engagements while he's here?"

She shook her head. "Not a thing," she said definitely. "Mr. Stern, I get your notion," said Dunning. "There must be something special about the 30th—something that's due to occur that day, quite apart from Mr. Wills, and the sooner we find out what it is, the better. What next?"

"There's Melanie," Hugo said abruptly. "We've accepted the date, but there are two other points to be considered. The word 'Amourie' is mentioned in connection with the Grimoire. It may be anything—the name of the present printer for example, but if you like I'll charge myself with trying to trace it. I've lived on this coast a long time, and I've friends among the fisher-folk and shopkeepers who might help me. The other point to be considered is this Club des Sans Clubs, whatever that may be, which meets at the Caves des Muettes and the Chateau la Vague. I'll have a shot at finding the Caves, if you like, for the same reason as before, but as for the Chateau—"

"All right," I said, "I'll take care of that. I'm shifting my traps here tonight." I explained to Dunning. "Apart from investigating the club, I've a strong desire to see a little more of that housekeeper who there's one last query I'd like to raise. What about keeping a watch of some sort on Geis and Baron Stahl? And this man Verner—can't we discover what and where he is? For all we know, he may be perfecting their arrangements somewhere else, while the other two sit here and keep us off the scent."

The big man inclined his head. "That reminds me that there's an item of information I've neglected to pass on. My investigations convinced me that the first time while other groups were behind certain of the policies, these three men, Verner, Rakovsky, and Stahl, were the guiding hand that controlled the lot—in other words they were the three principal lieutenants, acting directly under their chief, and just as soon as I'd got that figured out, I made it my business to find out a little more about them."

Reprimand For Otilie

HE TOOK off his spectacles, swinging them slowly between finger and thumb. "Stahl was easy," he said. "He's the international bucket-shop expert, grown so rich the law can't touch him, floating one fake company after another and always getting clear while the going is good, and leaving his associates to face the music. Rakovsky was so difficult, either he's the adventuresome type, pure and simple, dabbling in every kind of dirty deal, but Verner was a tougher problem. It took me quite a while to track him down, but eventually I managed to get a glimpse of the Martinez family scandal in London, fifteen years ago."

"There was a nasty scandal, but the only charge that could be brought was maladministration, which isn't an indictable offense, and Martinez himself had disappeared so completely from view that after a bit no one thought any more about him. They might have looked a bit longer and thought a bit more if they'd realized that Martinez was only his middle name. Charles Martinez Verner was what his god-parents handed out to him at his baptism."

"Phew!" said I. "And where is the gentleman now?"

Dunning shook his head. "At the moment he eludes me, but I know that he's an old man and a sick man, and I don't fancy he counts for much in this organization."

"In that case," I said, "we can rule out Mr. Verner, but what about the other two?"

"Ah!" said the big man, "that's where I come in. I may say that I've a few men scattered along this coast-line, and it will be my duty and my pleasure to detail certain of them to keep an eye on those two gentlemen. I promise you I won't be idle."

"And me?" asked the girl plaintively. "What's my job to be, gentlemen?"

"You," said Dunning hurriedly, "have got just about the most urgent job of all. Otilie, you've got to persuade your uncle right away to shift from Antibes to the Carlton here in Cannes. The Cap's a lonely spot. We can't look after him adequately while he's there, and the fact that the Baron's a fellow-guest doesn't add any to my peace of mind. Can you do that, do you think?"

"I'll fix it," said the girl, nodding her head. "It won't be any too easy, but I'll do it. And after that," she added thoughtfully, "I guess I'll be like Cuthbert and pursue my own line of investigation independently."

Hugo broke in curtly. "Miss Wills, he said, 'understand this please. If you start any independent investigations, I wash my hands of the whole affair, once and for all. It isn't your personal safety that I'm concerned with, so much as the fact that, by some foolishness, you may endanger us all and make it impossible to help your uncle.'"

She stared at him, too furious to speak, then she marched out on the terrace where Ada sat, a monument of patience surrounded by tea-cups.

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Tomorrow: The mysterious house-keeper.

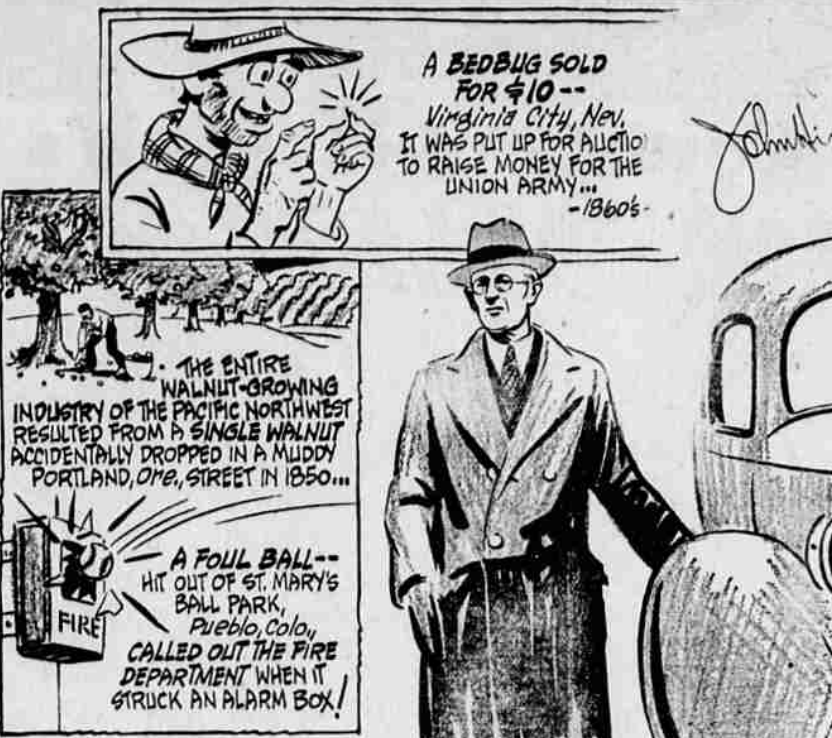
The couple arrived in Denver aboard a United Airlines plane and readily informed reporters and photographers they were eloping, but had intended it should be a secret. Miss Kuhn is daughter of the late Dr. Leroy Philip Kuhn, Chicago surgeon. Crosby's dance band has been playing in Chicago.

Death Appeal Deferred

SALEM, Sept. 22.—(AP)—The supreme court hearing of the appeal of Leroy Herchel McCarthy, Portland, from a first degree murder conviction was postponed today from next Tuesday to October 4.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



ALLEN BUSH HILL -- 56,
 of Corpus Christi, Texas,
 HAS DRIVEN OVER
 400,000 MILES
 IN 30 YEARS--
 YET HE HAS NEVER
 HAD AN ACCIDENT NOR
 BEEN ARRESTED!

Nevada's gold mines were just what their name implied during the Civil War, when generous gifts of money were contributed by that state to the support of the Union Army. Virginia City was determined to outdo all other mining camps in the matter of contributions, and a large number of articles, from mining stock to shotguns, were contributed for an auction.

Strange as it seems, during the auction a miner, in a spirit of fun, picked a bedbug off a neighbor's coat and offered it for sale on the block. It was actually

bid up to \$10.00—Presumably in the same spirit of fun—and the \$10.00 went to the Union Army's Sanitary Fund.

Industry From a Walnut

A German sea captain in 1849 so, sail down the Rhine River, around the Horn, and up to Chile. With him went a supply of walnuts, a delicacy he would not do without.

At Chile the captain replenished his nut stock with a fine cargo of thin-shelled walnuts. They tasted so good that he decided to keep them for his own use.

Up the Pacific Coast he sailed,

docking at San Francisco in 1850. There he sold a bag of the walnuts, which eventually reached the caring hands of John Berton, a Santa Barbara rancher. An industry was born there.

Up to Portland, Oregon, sailed the captain, where he inadvertently dropped one of his walnuts in a muddy street. It soon sprouted. The shoot was transplanted and cared for by Emma Brooks, a pioneer housewife. From such a humble beginning sprang the entire walnut-growing industry of the United States, centered on the West coast.

Tomorrow: The blind astronomer.

Oldest Indian Dead

TOLEDO, Sept. 22.—(AP)—One of Oregon's oldest Indians, Kate Chentille, is dead. The Rev. Mr. Roy Downer, after studying records at Oregon City, learned that she was about 12 years old at the time Father McLoughlin, the famous settler, was there and he thus estimated her age at 108 at the time of death this week.

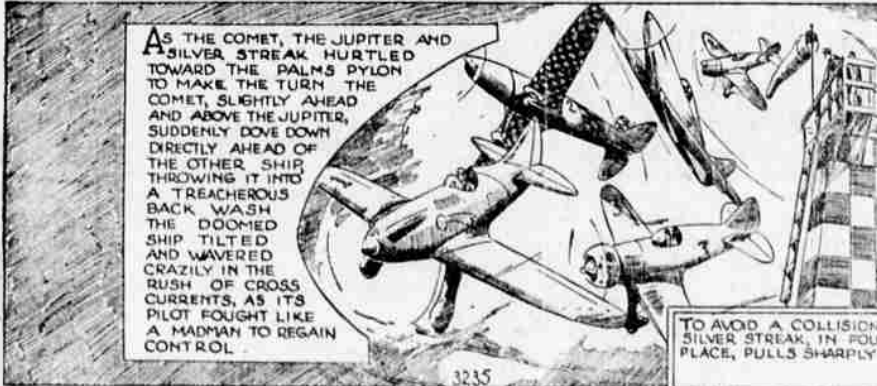
WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows (reasonably) Truettwerder Cabinet Works

ROSEBURG C. OF C. FOR PICKET LAW

ROSEBURG, Ore., Sept. 22.—(AP)—The Roseburg chamber of commerce last night went on record unanimously endorsing the Association of Farmers of Oregon initiative proposal to prohibit picketing unless the place picketed is involved in a direct strike brought about by the majority of the employees of the industry affected.

The directors also vehemently reiterated their former stand against any proposal to divert gas tax moneys for any purpose whatsoever, feeling that "these funds are a sacred trust to be used in the building and maintenance of Oregon highways."

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Doomed Ship!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Private Talk?

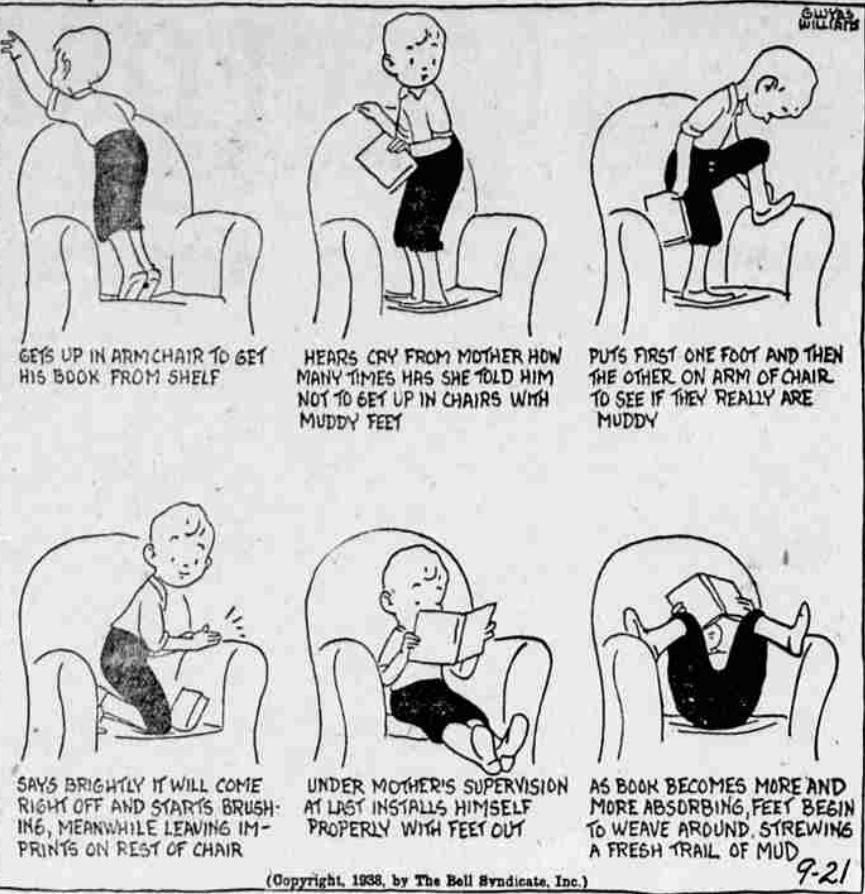


THE NEBBS—No Sale



MUDDY FEET

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



SMATTER POI

By C M PAYNE



By HAL FORRESTER

CROONER'S KIN IN PLANE ELOPEMENT

DENVER, Sept. 22.—(AP)—Bob Crosby, orchestra leader and brother of Crooner Bing Crosby, and June Kuhn, 19-year-old Chicago debutante, were eloping by air today to Portland, Ore., where they said they would be married late today.