

# THE CLOUDS MOON

By MAX SALTmarsh

**The Characters**  
Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera.  
Archie Lumsden, myself, Hugo's friend.  
René Geiss, cartoonist, master mind behind a murder plot.

Yesterday: Verner, the second of Geiss's confederates, lives at the Château. I accompany him to the beach, and two men attack me in the water.

## Chapter 25 Discussion

I HAD exactly one second, before the grip on my throat tightened, to fill my lungs with the clear, sweet air. Then down, down I went into solid green depths of water. I hadn't realized ever before in my life—who had always been a crack under-water swimmer—how hard it would be to hold one's breath with a suffocating pressure on one's windpipe. It had all passed in a flash, and I was almost at the bottom before I realized what had happened. It was another minute before I could think what to do.

There were two men holding me, one by the throat and one by the ankles. Both were swimming with their legs only, for their arms were otherwise engaged. I kicked out desperately to free my ankles, but found them caught in an iron grip.

It was no time for ethics or clean fighting. My head was bursting and my chest cracked with the terrible strain. I brought up my arms, fumbled for the second face, which I could not see, and drove my thumbs into the eye-sockets, digging at the eyeballs.

I felt the man writhe, and a sudden wave of blind, crimson fury swept over me. If it was his eyes or my life, his eyes must go. I dug deeper and suddenly the grip on my throat slackened and dropped away. I saw a dim, black and white shape surge upward. Then I doubled up sharply and caught at the neck of the merchant who held my legs. If the trick had answered so well with me, it would do equally well for him.

But he was no fighter when the odds were even. Almost before my fingers fastened on his wet throat, he loosed my ankles, wriggling to get away, and I let him go, slanting upward like a rising trout. When I drifted thankfully to the surface myself.

It was a queer scene that met my eyes as I looked towards the beach. The four other fellows were standing knee-deep in the water, but as I looked two of them ran farther out to give a hand to the first of my late opponents. The man I had just parted from was meanwhile swimming for his life to shore, while the remaining two had made a dash for the car, and even as I watched, I heard the roar of the starting engine. And all the time, half standing in his wheeled chair, old Mr. Verner was shrieking helpless objurgations, while Amédée hovered anxiously about him.

For an instant I wondered if he was upbraiding his employees for falling in their job, but all that mattered to me was that they had failed, and I took my way back to shore at a leisurely pace.

"Well," I said, "that was an exciting five minutes while it lasted." The old man stared up at me. His face was gray. "What happened?" he demanded.

"Nothing," I answered, "except that these gentlemen, for some reason, had a fancy for drowning me. One of them faked an attack of cramp, and when I went to help him, he got me by the throat, while another fellow gripped my ankles. If I hadn't been used to swimming under water, I'd be passing the time of day with my forefathers by now. But at least, I added with satisfaction, "I gave him a couple of sore eyes to remember me by."

"I won't have it!" "It's an outrage!" he said, very pink, his old voice shaking. "Unthinkable—unthinkable! I won't have it—I won't have it!"

He caught suddenly at his side, and the gray tinge in his cheeks deepened. "Amédée," he said abruptly, "take me back to the house at once. I am ill. And you, sir—you must come with me. It is not safe for you to remain here alone."

It was a queer thought that I should be safer in the company of Verner the banker, but queerer still was the fact that I believed him, and without a word I fell into step beside the wheel-chair. The sight of the housekeeper standing rigidly under the pillared portico, watching our advance across the terrace, brought me back to grim reality with a jerk.

Whether or not she was surprised to see me returning safe and whole I couldn't tell, for her round pink face was as blank as a stone image; but she came forward swiftly and laid a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"You are not well, Mr. Verner," she said quickly. "Amédée, take the patron straight to his room; I will come at once." Then she turned to me. "I hope you enjoyed your bath?"

"I have never had one like it," I answered simply, and was for making tracks for my room when she stopped me with a gesture.

"One moment, Mr. Lumsden. I am sorry to trouble you, but the key—"

"Of course!" I said. "The key—why, yes, certainly! I'll bring it down to you on my way out."

I made my way up the stairs, but just on the bend I halted, checked by the sound of angry voices.

"Henrietta!" came the old man's shrill falsetto. "It was an outrage, a dastardly outrage! I won't be argued with. You will telephone at once—tell him I must see him this morning or there will be trouble."

I went on my way, convinced that, however odd it seemed, the prospect of my sudden demise was not pleasing to Mr. Verner, and wondering not a little who it was that he was summoning so urgently to see him.

My bed was made and my room tidied for the day, but as I opened the bag to get out a clean shirt, I observed with interest that other hands than mine had been examining the contents.

For an instant I was at a loss to know what they had been looking for; then suddenly I remembered the key and chuckled to myself, reflecting that the housekeeper was taking no chances of my doing any unauthorized night rambling. I opened my door cautiously. The passage was deserted; there was no sound from the rooms below, and in a couple of seconds I had raised the tile, satisfied myself that the cause of all the trouble was securely in its hiding-place, and replaced the covering; then I strolled downstairs again.

### "The Conscience"

THERE was a small door to the left of the counter, and as I passed it, I heard a female voice raised high in irritation. I paused for a moment, and the voice of Miss Henrietta Adams sounded clearly in my ears.

"Is that the Cap d'Antibes?" she was saying. "I've been trying to get you for five minutes. I must speak at once to Baron Stahl."

I rapped on the door and opened it without waiting for permission, inserting my head through the opening to see a small, bare room and the housekeeper sitting at a littered desk, her hand on the telephone.

"Mr. Lumsden!" she said sharply. "Do you want something?" "Only my key," I retorted mildly. "It's nowhere in my room, and I thought perhaps the servants might have come across it when they were tidying up."

She glared at me. "It is not likely, but I will ask them," she said andy.

"Anyway," I added comfortingly, "if it's lost, it'll probably turn up somewhere when you least expect it." With that I left her.

Stahl was coming, urgently summoned by Verner, and that summons had its origin in the recent attempt on my life. It was vitally necessary that I should hear what passed at the interview.

I went up to my room, closed the shutters, and sat down, my elbows on the window-ledge, to watch the front gate. Finally, a big gray sports car pulled up in the lane outside, and a small fat figure in canary-colored trousers strutted importantly towards the house.

So far I had had no opportunity to explore the upper story of the house, but I had a pretty good idea of how the land lay, and now, as stealthily as a mousing cat, I crept along the wide passage and halted outside the door that I knew must be Verner's. There was never a sound, I took hold of the handle, and felt the door swing gently open.

I could hear now a faint murmur of voices coming from the door on my left, but when I tiptoed past him and set my ear to the crack, the words were still indistinguishable.

I stared around me, completely at a loss. Before me stretched the corridor, cool, empty, and singularly unhelpful, but at the end, facing me, I saw another door. It stood half open, and when I peered round it I found that I was at the head of a back stairway, with another door on my right, opening into a service pantry.

There was a window here, and when I cautiously thrust my head through it, I could have whooped for joy. Clear and brittle on the sparkling air came the voice of Baron Stahl, not two yards away from me.

"You will not have this young man killed!" he demanded, on a rising note of indignation. "Now, that is very nice! And it was to tell me this that you bring me hastening from Antibes, on this morning of all others, when the old man and the girl have packed up and gone to Cannes, for no reason that I know, and in consequence all our plans, all our arrangements, must be remade? To tell me that you like the young man, that you have a bad heart, that you do not wish him killed before your eyes! How many people, I ask you—crowned heads, statesmen, financiers—have died without a protest from you? And yet, for this one big Englishman, a nobody, a nothing, you endanger our plans, you develop the conscience!"

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Tomorrow: More trouble with Ottilie.

## STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



**ST. JAMES PALACE**  
former London residence of British kings, is built on the exact site of a former leper colony! (Hospital of St. James the Less)

**"DEAD" LETTER OFFICE!**  
BLEACHED BUFFALO SKULLS WERE USED AS "POST OFFICES" BY MORMONS CROSSING THE PRAIRIES IN THE 1840'S... LETTERS WERE LEFT IN THEM FOR LATER IMMIGRANTS....

**ST. James Palace.**  
Scene of many a gay function was St. James Palace, long the official London home of British kings. Yet strange as it seems, on the exact site on which the palace stands today once stood the Hospital of St. James the Less, a home for incurable lepers! Originally containing 14 leprous women, the hospital is mentioned in history as early as 1100. The exact date of its erection is vague. Henry VIII acquired the building and grounds in 1552, replacing it with a fine hunting lodge.

First king to use the building as his London home was William II, who ascended the throne in 1089; reigning sovereigns continued to live there until 1820 when George IV ascended the throne.

Queen Victoria transferred the official residence to Buckingham Palace, but the British court still is officially known as the Court of St. James. Little of the old place remains standing today.

**Pirate's Mistake.**  
Under command of Captain Bartholomew Sharpe, famous pirate, the outfit ship, "Most Holy Trinity," in July, 1685, captured the "Holy Rosary," Spanish merchantman, in South American waters.

Looting her, the pirate crew found in the hold a cargo of heavy metal "brigs" which they thought were tin. To lighten their prize, the pirates threw the lot overboard.

One pirate, however, saved a pig for himself, and eventually took it to England, to have it cast into bullets. Analysis showed that the metal was silver instead; the pirates had thrown away \$270,000 worth of the precious metal.

Tomorrow: The man who turned \$6 into \$30,000,000.

**Fisherman Dies.**  
AUBURN, Cal., Sept. 28. — (P) — A weekend fishing trip up the Middle fork of the American River ended fatally for Sidney I. Dees, 39, of Roseville, mine foreman. Reports said Dees suffered a heart attack yesterday and fell from a rocky embankment. His skull was crushed.

**Grandpa Twice on the Same Day.**  
PENDELTON, Ore., Sept. 28. — (AP) — Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Aldrich of Pendleton became grandpas twice when their only children — two daughters—became mothers the same day.

A grandson was born early Monday at Corvallis to Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Forrester, Jr., and early in the evening a granddaughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Bedford, Jr., at Flagstaff, Arizona, although the Bedfords reside at Williams, Ariz.

Mr. and Mrs. Forrester, Sr., reside at Marshfield, Ore., and Mr. and Mrs. Bedford, Sr., live at Williams. Aldrich is a member of the state highway commission, and editor and publisher of the Pendleton East Oregonian.

**Tailspin Tommy—Was It Tommy?**



**BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Free Country?**



**THE NEBBES—Cheerful News**

## SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



FRED PERLEY COULDN'T KEEP HIS DATE AT THE GOLF CLUB THE OTHER DAY BECAUSE HE HAD BOLTED THE BACK DOOR BEFORE VARNISHING THE FLOOR OF THE REAR ENTRY, WHICH LEFT NO VERY GOOD WAY OF GETTING AT THE KEY OF THE CAR, LEFT HANGING ON ITS HOOK.

By C M PAYNE



WHEN A HORSE SEES A HORSE IT GETS SCARED. HUH-H?

By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS



By SOL HESS



By SOL HESS

## STRIKERS ACCEPT LA GUARDIA PLAN

NEW YORK, Sept. 28. — (P) — Mayor La Guardia's compromise proposal for settlement of the strike of 15,000 truck drivers was accepted by the strikers at noon today at a meeting in Memon temple. The truck owners rejected the proposal yesterday.

duction in the present weekly base pay of \$44 to \$38.50. The old contract, which provided for a 47-hour week, expired September 1. The strikers, members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Chauffeurs, has asked for a 40-hour week without a pay reduction.

**Plan Buffalo Feast**  
YUBA CITY, Cal., Sept. 28. — (P) — A buffalo barbecue October 16 will dedicate the new four-mile stretch of the Tuko-Ukiah highway and the bridge over Sutter Yuba.