

THE CLOUDED MOON

By MAX SALTSMARSH

The Characters
Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera.
Archibald Lumsden, himself, his friend.
René Geiss, head of a murder conspiracy.
Ottile Wills, American heiress.

Yesterday: Venner tells Stahl to leave me alone. Hugo and Ottile quarrel, when he finds her coquetting with Geiss.

Chapter 27

Posing For Geiss

EVENING found us on the Carlton terrace, shaking hands with Mr. Virgoe Wills.

He was alone, a fact on which he commented as soon as he had settled us with our drinks. "I surely can't think what's keeping Ottile," he observed. "Half past four she went out, and two hours is certainly long enough to get your picture made, when it's only a sketch."

Hugo stiffened in his chair. "Picture?" he echoed sharply, and the old man nodded.

"This Mr. Geiss was all set on making a picture of Ottile; nothing would suit him but that she should sit for him."

"Do you mean," asked Hugo slowly, "that Miss Wills has gone alone to Geiss's villa?"

The old man raised his eyebrows. "Is there any reason," he asked quietly, "why my niece should not go alone to this individual's studio?"

"Every reason in the world," Hugo answered bluntly. "And I know Geiss."

Virgoe Wills frowned, pursing his lips. "She's certainly late," he admitted, "but she's not alone. Cassandra Chubb is with her, and Cassandra, gentlemen, is a woman in a million. She was nurse to my nieces as little girls."

"That's all right, then," I said, considerably relieved, but Hugo still frowned.

"I don't want to disturb you unduly, sir," he said, "but have I your permission to go round to the villa and bring your niece back?"

A second time the old man raised his eyebrows; then slowly he nodded.

"I don't entirely grasp the cause of your concern for my niece, but I believe in the disinterestedness of your motives. Go by all means."

Hugo got to his feet, and together we made our way toward the rue du Dragon.

Dusk was falling, and the little street, close-folded in its edging of trees, was dim and shadowed. As we halted before the iron gate of number 87, I was conscious of a goose-flesh sensation up my spine, coupled with a shiver that ran over me like a cold wave. There was something sinister in the very quiet of the scene, so still, so silent, and yet so near the very heart and hubbub of the town; and when the peep-hole shutter slid aside at our ring and I saw the pale face of the manservant surveying us through it, it seemed to me that he was the very incarnation of evil.

He started perceptibly as he recognized us. "Monsieur does not receive," he said hurriedly, before ever we had time to put a question, and the shutter was closed.

We stood there in the deserted road staring at each other. What to do I couldn't imagine.

Quiet As A Graveyard

AND then, just as hope died, came a most welcome interruption. On the other side of the gate there broke out what sounded singularly like a dog-fight; I heard a chatter of angry voices, something that echoed like a hearty slap, and next moment the door itself flew open and there showed in the aperture a small, stout, irate woman.

"Are you from Mr. Wills?" she demanded, and when we nodded: "Praise be!" she commented piously, adding sharply: "Well, step in! Don't stand mooning!"

We followed her, step by step, at her heels, past the manservant, standing aside, pale and malevolent, and up the glass-roofed passage to the house. The hall lay before us, a dim, gracious place of pearl-gray paneling and silver marble floor, but it was almost menacingly empty, and as we entered, Hugo swung round on the woman.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

She had been strutting before us like a small, belligerent turkey-cock, but at his words all her assurance dropped from her.

"In there," she said, pointing with a stubby, trembling forefinger to a closed door on our right. "That's the studio. They went in there two hours back, and Ottile said to wait for her; but when I saw it was getting late and rapped on the door, there was no answer, and when I tried the handle, it was locked." Her lip trembled suddenly. "There's not a sound from inside," she said. "It's as quiet as a graveyard."

In two strides Hugo was beside the door. He knocked sharply, listened for a moment, then called: "Is anyone there?" But there was no answering call, and with tightened lips he turned to me. "You see? If they're there, she's unconscious. No one answers."

"Oh, Heaven!" said Cassandra Chubb, with a strangled sob; and then, on a sudden gale of fury: "If there's something wrong—if that graven image has laid a finger on her—"

"All right," I said, giving her shoulder a comforting pat. "If anything's happened, Mr. Geiss will be adequately attended to and you'll have first smack at him, I promise you. But first we've got to find out."

"I turned to Hugo, 'Try again,' I advised, and he beat a thunderous tattoo on the panels. 'Geiss!' he shouted. 'Open the door, damn you!' but nothing stirred."

He swung round on me, his face livid with fury. "Come on!" he said. "We've got to smash this door."

But I had been doing a bit of thinking, and I had remembered Jean-François's description of the lay-out of the house. I turned to where the manservant stood, watching us maliciously.

"Come here, my friend," I said, and as he reluctantly approached, I drew a couple of hundred-franc notes from my wallet. "See here," said I, twirling them suggestively, "I want a little information. Tell me there's a second exit from the studio?"

He took a long look at the money and nodded silently.

"And that door," I continued, "opens into the private chamber of Monsieur Geiss—the room which you are not permitted to enter?"

He started at that, and his pale face grew paler. "Monsieur is well informed," he said slowly, and his open hand came forward tentatively, but I drew back a step.

"I haven't had two hundred francs' worth of information yet," I warned him. "Tell me, is there a second key to the studio door?"

Gulls

HE SHOOK his head. "Alas, no!" said he. "Monsieur Geiss and the young lady are without doubt in the private room, but the door from the studio is very strong, and that other door—" He jerked his head towards the end of the hall—"is even stronger. Also, Monsieur Geiss opens to no one when he is in that room."

"Not?" I commented dryly.

"Well, it's all to try for," I handed him the notes. "Go, my friend," I said. "Retire yourself into the uttermost recesses of your kitchen and don't come out till you're called for."

I watched him steal, cat-footed, across the hall and vanish through another door, then I turned to Cassandra Chubb, waiting at my elbow. "Stay here and keep an eye on the lines of communication," I told her, and she gave me a swift approving nod.

There was a gently curving staircase at the hall's end, and beside it two malachite pillars flanked a narrow passage. Side by side Hugo and I made our way down it, but as we halted before the door at the far end, I groaned.

"Phew!" I said dully. "That unpleasant mental spoke the truth. It would take a wagon-load of dynamite to shift this obstruction."

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"Phew!" I said dully. "That unpleasant mental spoke the truth. It would take a wagon-load of dynamite to shift this obstruction."

It was painfully true. The door that faced us was a massive affair of bleached oak, hand-hewn and broken only by a minute key-hole and a queer-looking, hammer-lustily, but for a minute there was no reply; then, thin and thread-like through the solid wood, I heard a faint voice.

"Who knocks?" it said.

"It's Hugo Stern and Lumsden," I called back cheerfully. "Come to fetch Miss Ottile Wills. Her uncle is waiting for her."

I looked at Hugo with raised eyebrows. "Smash the blasted thing in!" he said between his teeth, but I gave another look at the door and shook my head.

"Samson couldn't do it," I told him. "No, old lad, we've got to try guile."

I put my lips to the keyhole. "Geiss!" I called. "Are you still there?"

"Indeed I am here, but you, my friends, unfortunately, are out there in the passage, and there, I fear, you must remain."

I laughed. "Oh, well," said I, very loudly and clearly, "we care! I know all about your padded cell in there, and your black walls and your tame goat. I don't want to see it!"

For an instant complete silence hung heavy in the air, and then, so suddenly that I almost lost my balance, the door flew open and I saw Geiss standing in the aperture. His blunt lips hung apart in an almost ludicrous surprise, and the pebble-like eyes glared at me in a mixture of amazement and fury.

"You?" he said hoarsely. "You again? What do you know of my secret room? Who has told you?"

"Ah!" said I. "That's my little secret." And I pushed passed him into the room with Hugo at my heels.

"Ottile!" Hugo said sharply. "Are you all right?"

The girl made a little hopeless gesture of her hands.

"Can't a person have even a half a day to herself without interference?" she complained. "Certainly I'm all right. Mr. Geiss is making the loveliest picture of me, and he's been telling me the most interesting things to keep me amused, all about this bradette that's happening next Sunday, and a friend of his that's expected any day in the harbor..."

She looked up at Hugo, with a meaning, warning look in her dark eyes, but he was in no state to notice it.

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Tomorrow: Lover's quarrel.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

STARTED IN THE YEAR 1700, A CLOCK OWNED BY Mrs. J. W. Hudson, Monrovia, Calif. IS STILL RUNNING AFTER 238 YEARS!

THE BOSTON RED SOX IS THE ONLY BASEBALL CLUB TO HAVE PLAYED IN MORE THAN ONE WORLD SERIES WITHOUT LOSING A SERIES... (THEY PLAYED IN 5--1903, '12, '15, '16, '18)

A CATERPILLAR WILL BLEED TO DEATH FROM A SLIGHT SCRATCH

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON—famous American naturalist, AFTER FAILING IN EVERY BUSINESS VENTURE HE ATTEMPTED, COMPILED, ILLUSTRATED, AND PUBLISHED A \$1000 SET OF BOOKS ON AMERICAN BIRDS, GROSSING \$200,000 ON THE DEAL! —1938—

John James Audubon Born at Les Cayes, Santo Domingo, the son of a French naval officer and a Creole West Indian woman. John James Audubon in 1785 started a life that was to lead him through one business misadventure after another. Audubon was educated in France and studied art there. He returned to America to care for his father's farm near Philadelphia, and soon married a neighbor, Lucy Bakewell. The Audubons moved to Kentucky and thence to Louisiana. Try as he might, Audubon failed in business time and again. He was forced to resort to teaching dancing and fencing to buy food. From his boyhood Audubon had loved birds and had drawn many sketches and water-color illustrations of them. These he took to England in 1826, where he elaborated them and published, from 1827 to 1838, a series of 1,065 color plates of American birds entitled "The Birds of America." Audubon was his own author, publisher, and salesman. Before the venture started he had taken orders for 80 sets at \$1000 each. In all, about 190 full sets were sold, as well as other incomplete selections of prints. He realized about \$200,000 on this deal. Included in the set was a single print of the wild turkey, full size, which today is frequently valued more highly than the original cost of the entire bound set. Audubon is honored by many "Audubon" or bird-loving societies that have enlisted over half a million persons in a protective crusade against the destruction of bird life here and abroad.

has devised means of keeping a closer check on these wanderers, with the result that there are only 22,787 of them left, according to latest statistics. The decrease is attributed to various job creation schemes.

Iowa Had Monsters SPRING GROVE, Iowa.—(AP)—A huge petrified bone found buried in a gravel pit here has been identified by geologists as a section of a mastodon of the prehistoric era 100,000 years ago. The bone was found 25 feet below the earth's surface.

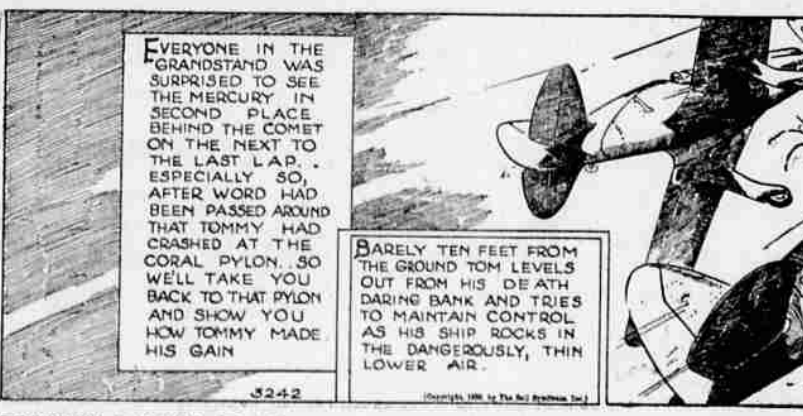
Eliminating Hoboes BERLIN.—(AP)—The day of the hobo seems over in Nazi Germany. When Hitler took power, approximately 300,000 "knights of the road" roamed the country. Nazi officialdom

and cricket, popular games in this colorful Spanish-type city. Many former English residents live here or spend their winters in Santa Barbara's mild climate, which makes Santa Barbara a cricket center. Lights will permit the playing of night sports.

The extremely wide beach makes the ocean front stadium possible, since the waterline is about 600 feet from the end of the playing field. A running track will be built around the football field and provision will be made for the playing of rugby.

May with the cutting back of the bluff into a saucer shape for one end of the field. The soil from the bluff was spread over the sand for a three-foot depth foundation to carry the 18 inches of topsoil and turf.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Into First Place!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Plan

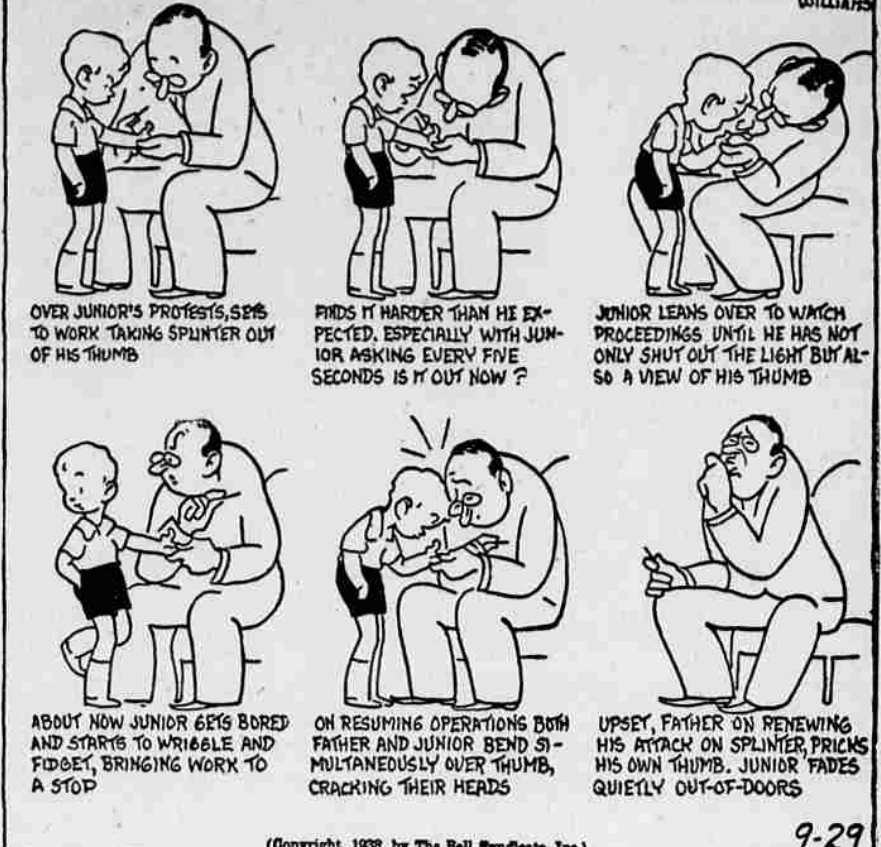


THE NEBBS—A Letter



SPLINTER REMOVAL

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

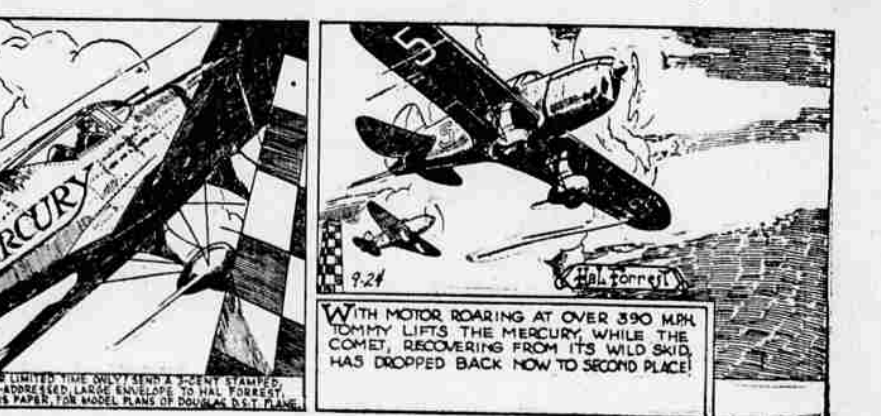


8 MATTER POT

By C M PAYNE



By HAL FORREST



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Plan



THE NEBBS—A Letter



SANTA BARBARA BUILDS STADIUM BESIDE THE SEA

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—(UP)—The Santa Barbara State college gridiron is believed to be the only football

stadium in America built on the seashore. College officials are enthusiastic as they point to the unique setting of the new field—nestled in a bluff overlooking the picturesque Santa Barbara yacht harbor and the blue Pacific, with the Santa Barbara Island jutting up over the horizon. The stadium is adjacent to the site of the new campus for the college on the ocean front. The state has appropriated \$350,000 and actual work on the campus will start as soon as an application for federal aid is approved. Work on the stadium started in