

# THE CLOUDED MOON

By MAX SALTmarsh

**The Characters**  
 Hugo Stern, handsome author, living on the French Riviera.  
 Archie Lumsden, myself, Hugo's friend.  
 René Geiss, head of a murder conspiracy.

Yesterday I'm suspected of Venner's murder.

### Chapter 33

#### The Unshorn Truth

TWICE during Wednesday I was haled again to the death-chamber and put through my paces, but by now I was wary. I had told my story, and was sticking to it. Three times the next day I made the trip to the police station, sat for half an hour in a small, stuffy room, and submitted to a quick-fire battery of questions from a succession of plain-clothes men.

Dusk was falling as the car deposited me at the gates of the Château for the third time, and I was brain- and body-weary. The hall was empty and shadowed, but as I turned towards the lounge, a movement behind the office counter halted me, and I saw the chasseur eyeing me from behind it, his eyes pale luminous slits in the dark.

... of him all the repressed irritation, the nerve strain of the last two days, suddenly came to a head. The brutal, the more hurriedly after the opera-house shooting.

I could have bitten out my tongue next minute, but the mischief was done. He sprang back, his hand flew to his trouser-pocket, and next instant I found myself staring into the muzzle of an ugly-looking gun.

"Put it down!" I said sharply, but even as I spoke, a tall, angular whirlwind swept out from the office beside us. It was the house-keeper, her round, puckered face contorted with rage. "Are you mad?" she said sharply to the chasseur. "Put that thing away!" And as he obeyed sulkily, she swung round on me.

"This is too much!" she said furiously. "How dare you threaten my servants? You will not have it, do you hear? You, a criminal, a suspected murderer! I shall report you to the police."

"Report away, woman," I advised her. "It may be the last chance you have!" and I turned on my heel and stalked away.

I could have kicked myself for my stupidity, but I was too tired to do it. Body and mind alike were exhausted, and the one thing craved for was food and bed. But as I turned to mount the stairs, I noticed, in the angle of the balustrade, a set of bookshelves crammed with aged and tattered volumes.

A curtain was hanging behind them, concealing, I imagined, some wall cupboard, and I gave an idle tug to it.

It was no cupboard that the heavy plush concealed, but a small alcove, backed with a white-painted door which a notice was roughly tacked, and as I read it, every atom of fatigue dropped from me. It ran: "THE INNKEEPERS OF FRANCE, CLUB DES BANS CLUBS."

It might be the merest coincidence, for, after all, Hugo had said that there was a highly respectable club of that name but I printed up the stairs, two at a time, and rang for Amédée.

"Listen, friend," I said, when he rapped on the door. "That alcove behind the curtain in the lower hall—where does it lead?"

"Monsieur," he said, "it leads, one believes, to the cellars, but these many years the door has not been opened."

"What cellars?" I cut in sharply. "Under the house?" But he shook his head.

"Under the terrace. There is another door in the lower garden, but that, too, has never been opened, to my knowledge."

I was immensely elated, for it seemed that, after weary hours of inaction, I had stumbled on something big—the second meeting-place of that ill-omened club.

pointed to the table, on which lay a sheet of white paper, a pen, and an ink-well. "In one hour," said he, "we shall return to find your confession written there!" and one by one, silently and inexorably, they filed from the room.

I sat there holding my head, conscious only that the spinning world was slowly steadying on its axis, and little by little I came to the realization that I was alone in an empty room, with the paper spread invitingly before me, and the pen lying ready to my hand.

For a moment a mad impulse seized me to give them a confession of another sort: "I, René Geiss," that was how I would start, "do hereby confess that I instigated the killing of Eve Monet; that I myself shot down in cold blood the American O'Donnell; that I personally instructed the chasseur to kill Mr. Venner."

I picked up the pen, dipped it in the ink, and drew a flourish on the paper.

It was a queer-looking flourish, uncommonly like the horn of a goat, and almost without realizing what I was doing I added a second line and then another and yet another; and slowly, as I drew, found something growing under my inexperienced fingers.

It was the head of a goat, horned and bearded, its pebble-like eyes boring into mine, and those eyes were the eyes of René Geiss. And as I sat there, staring back into those expressionless eyes, I heard the door open behind me.

I swung round in my chair and saw the huge d'instinction peering in at me.

#### One Little Hint!

HIS eye lighted on the table, and I thanked my stars that I had had the forethought to turn the drawing upside down but at sight of the pen, the ink, the paper, he rapped out a sudden oath. "The imbeciles!" he muttered. "I will have their skin for this! Monsieur Lumsden, this was done by no order of mine."

He moistened his lips. His face was pale and drawn and there was a worried look in his eyes. "Monsieur Lumsden," he said at last, "you must be aware that everything in these two crimes points to you as the murderer."

I nodded. "I grant you that," I said candidly. "What then?"

He scrutinized me with sharp, intelligent eyes. "Just this," said he. "Monsieur Lumsden, I have seen many criminals. Every detail of these two crimes points to you as the killer—and yet every instinct that I have tells me that you are an innocent man. But my instincts also tell me that although you are in no way guilty, you know a great deal more about these crimes than you will admit. You could, if you would, lead me to the murderer!"

I considered that for a long minute. "Monsieur le Juge," I said at last, "I appreciate your confidence, as you say, that I believe I know who did the murder, but I have nothing to go on except a lot of wild surmises and crazy imaginings. There isn't a lot of tangible evidence that I could lay before you, and until I have something concrete to produce, I prefer to hold my tongue. Only, I'll tell you this: in my opinion, these three crimes were committed by three different people, but—" I broke off and looked him squarely between the eyes—behind all three of them there is the same man.

"And that man?" he asked, but even as he spoke, there came again the click of the opening door and next minute Fleuriot stood beside the desk.

"I interrupt you?" he queried dryly.

"Not at all," said I. "Monsieur le Juge and I have had a most informative conversation, and I think I am right in saying that he now acquires me of complicity in both crimes."

"Famous!" he retorted with a tinge of irony. "I may say that his conclusion agrees exactly with my own—but all the same, Monsieur Lumsden, I should be glad of a little further conversation with you. You will perhaps allow me to offer you conveyance in my automobile?"

"I should be charmed."

As I made to leave the room the judge took a quick step round the desk towards me. A curtain was already out of evidence, and satisfying himself of that by a quick sideways look, he caught my arm. "That man, Monsieur Lumsden," he said urgently, "the man at the back of the three crimes—can you not give me an inkling of whom you suspect?"

I shook my head. "Not for another day or two," I told him. "The thing's too serious to speak of lightly."

His grip tightened on my arm. "One little hint!" he muttered, and his voice was almost pleading.

I shook my head and he gave a sharp sigh, hesitating, his fingers toying nervously with the paper on the desk. And suddenly, as he stood, I saw him flick over the top-most sheet. His eyes lighted on the drawing it held and he started violently, taking a swift backward step, his horrified gaze scanning my face. "Not—" he stammered "not he surely."

"There's my confession," I said slowly. And with that I turned and left him.

Tomorrow: My life is endangered, again.

done infrequently in the past in order to avert the interest money from leaving the states scattered coffers.

On the recent transactions Holman borrowed the \$100,000 from the general fund, issuing certificates of indebtedness against the state liquor commission. Interest to the commission was set at 37-100 of one per cent, to be paid by the relief agency which obtained the money. In that way the money need not go to some outside agency.

Holman cited figures for the period from Nov. 15, 1934, to July 15, 1938; during which time an aggregate of \$1,765,000 was borrowed upon such certificates and repaid, the last having been retired on Aug. 15, 1938.

The liquor commission, according to the most recent survey (Oct. 4)

## STATE BORROWING MONEY FROM SELF IS AN OLD TRICK

SALEM, Oct. 7.—(UP)—The feat of the state of Oregon borrowing from itself, as was done recently to gain \$100,000 for immediate relief needs, is not a new one, according to State Treasurer Rufus C. Holman who negotiated the loan.

He pointed out that it had been

can afford the money. The month of August showed a net profit of \$109,000.07, bringing the total net profit for the current fiscal year to \$380,876.68. The fiscal year started July 1.

been introduced in Breslau, Germany. For 90 cents anybody can have the historic city hall flood-lighted for three minutes by dropping the coin into an automaton.

Greensboro, N. C., produced 100,871 pounds of milk and 4,227 pounds of butterfat in 10 years.

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Floodlights by slot machine has

A 15-year old Holstein cow at

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ME TOO, MR. ORTMAN—PLEASE!

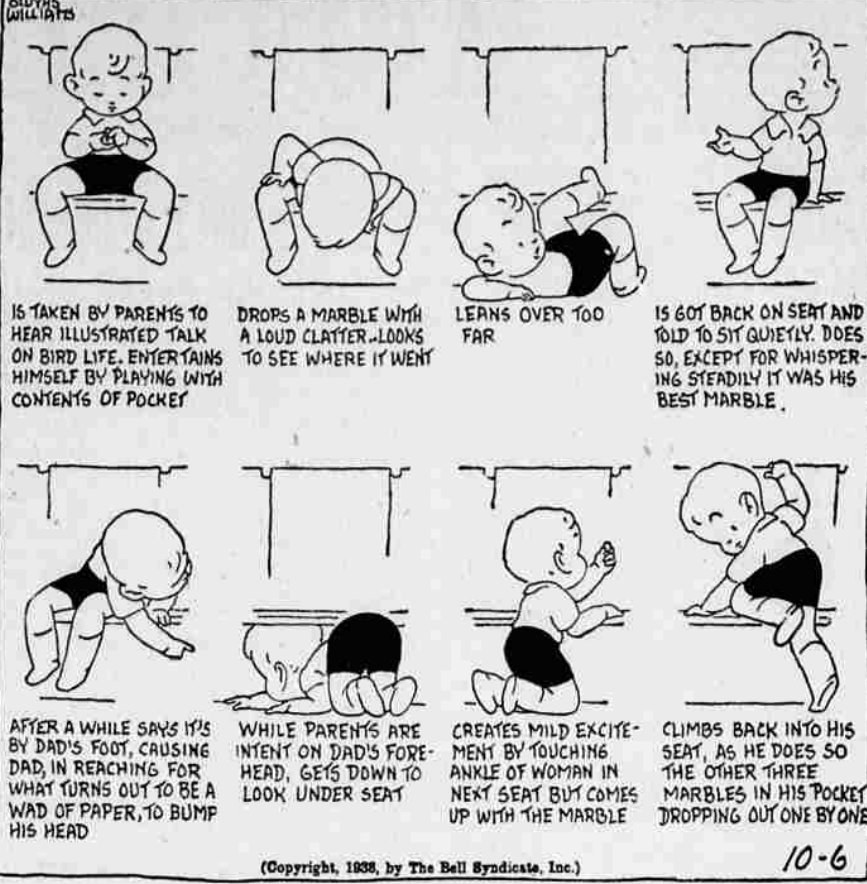
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