

THE CLOUDED MOON

By MAX SALTSMARSH

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

Yesterday Jean-Francois locates Baron Stahl's yacht and gets a job aboard it. Noah More tries to push me off a crowded bus, but an Arab working for Dunning saves me.

Chapter 35 Toothpicks For Two

THE café was a vast sea of crowded tables, set out under a canopy of trees. Hugo was sitting at a table on the outer fringe.

"Well," I said, as I dropped into the vacant chair beside him. "I've had a quiet day, but the evening promises to be livelier. If one can judge by the advance sample I've just had."

For answer he kicked me sharply on the ankle, motioning impatiently towards a man seated with his back to us at the next table. I bit back an exclamation for the fellow had raised his glass to his lips, and I saw that the index finger of the hand that held it was missing from the first joint.

Hugo's eyes met mine, but neither spoke a word, and so for a matter of twenty minutes we sat there, exchanging the usual polite banal of small talk. Then suddenly, things began to shift.

I noticed, gliding through the throng on the pavement, a tall Negro, in a crisp, white cotton dress, with a snowy muslin turban folded flatly about her small head. She was a splendid-looking creature, moving with a free, untrammelled grace, but there was a purpose in her movements, for as I looked, she turned sharp left, threading her way among the tables, and with a murmured word of apology sat down in the vacant seat opposite my neighbor.

He glanced up at her without the slightest sign of recognition. The Negroess settled herself at the table, reached forward and helped herself to one of the little paper-wrapped toothpicks from the china container before her.

For a moment she sat there idly twisting it between her fingers; then, to my surprise, instead of stripping off the flimsy covering, she started to thrust it into the bosom of her dress, changed her mind apparently, and replaced it in the little china pot. It was a pointless action, but its very meaninglessness made me suddenly on the alert. I glanced at Hugo and saw that he had noticed nothing.

A waiter passed, scurrying, and the Negroess called him and gave him her order. At the next moment the man opposite her threw a couple of coins on the table, yawned ostentatiously and got to his feet; but as he did so, he stooped and in his turn, with an absent-minded air, extracted a toothpick from the container.

Then he turned and slowly sauntered away in the direction of the harbor.

"Come on," I said to Hugo. "I've had enough of this. He glanced up sharply, caught the light in my eye, and rose to his feet. "What's the trouble?" he whispered as he followed me down the narrow aisle to the pavement.

"The trouble," said I, "is walking last ahead, and in half a dozen words I told him what had happened. "It's my bet that a message passed from hand to hand, snugly tucked away in that toothpick."

He whistled. "What do you propose to do?"

"Catch him in some dark spot and take the toothpick off him," I answered blithely.

"That's coming out into the open with a vengeance! If it could be arranged, I'd prefer something more subtle." And even as I said it, Providence itself answered him.

A Mission
I CANNONED into a dim figure in flowing white robes, which promptly laid a hand on my arm. "Monsieur," he whispered, "you have had no further trouble?"

It was the Arab carpet-seller and at sight of him I gave a gasp of relief. "Tell me," I said, catching him by the shoulder and drawing him on with us, "you work for Monsieur Dunning?"

"Indeed, yes!" he murmured. "Good enough!" said I. "Now listen! I've a job for you. You see that man ahead—in the white shirt and trousers, who is now crossing the square towards the left? You must follow him, see where he goes, and report to Monsieur Dunning. Tell him it is the man without a finger and we will understand. Also, in the case of a subject, there is a small matter of a toothpick which he carries in his right-hand trouser-pocket. Is it possible that under pretext of offering him a cigar, one might surreptitiously take that toothpick and convey it to Monsieur Dunning?"

He gave me a swift nod and departed.

"And where," said Hugo patiently as I turned back to him. "Did you find that addition to the League of Nations?"

"Draw up your stool to Uncle's knee," I retorted benevolently, "and I'll tell you" for I was feeling fairly pleased with myself. But as we drove home and I unfolded the tale, I detected a certain unresponsiveness in its reception.

"It's immensely exciting," he said, "but all it establishes when

boiled down is the fact that Geiss won't rest until he's done you, and if you find that a comforting thought to sleep on, you may have it!"

"I did sleep on it very comfortably notwithstanding, but at six next morning I woke to find Hugo sitting on the edge of my bed."

"I can't sleep," he said abruptly, "and I therefore don't see why you should either. Look here, Archie. Do you realize that this is Saturday? In twenty-four hours the game starts, and we're as far as ever from knowing how they mean to play it. I can't stand it, I tell you!" He broke off and stood up suddenly, as if the mere physical movement eased his nerves. "It's not only Virgoe Willis, but who knows what they may do to that fool of a girl, if she tries any more of her precious detective work!"

"Steady, old man," said I. "Try to realize that there's nothing we can do." But he shook his head impatiently.

"I don't do something, I'll go mad. I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it at finding out what Amouris is. I've got an idea that I can pick up some information on the other side of the frontier. It's just possible that it may be some place near Rakovsky's villa."

"I think it's an uncommonly sound idea," I assured him. "Do you want me to come along?"

"No," he answered more calmly. "It's essential that someone should be here in case anything crops up. Jean-Francois may have stumbled on something. Dunning, or even—" he hesitated—"the girl, I'll telephone at midday and hear if there's any news, and I suggest that you call a conference for, say, six thirty, here. I'll be back by then, and we can pool every possible shred of information we have and try to work out a plan."

The Message
I ACCEPTED my orders the more readily because I could think of nothing better to suggest, but when I tried to ring up Dunning, I was told that he had not been found either, and I had perforce to leave a message for the big man, inviting him and Miss Willis to cocktails at the chalet at six thirty.

Dunning's vast white figure lumbered round the angle of the terrace promptly at the time set. "Where's Otilie?" I asked, as I helped him to a drink.

"Hans't she come yet? She said she'd drive herself, for she was taking lunch with friends in Monte Carlo, but she surely won't be long."

"Well," I said, "Hugo's not here either, so we're not wasting any time." But even as I spoke, the telephone rang within the house, and when I sprang to answer I heard Hugo's voice at the other end.

"I'm here," he said, "and I'm alive and well, and I've got the trouble of anguished questioning, but I'm no nearer finding what I came to seek, and I've had a darned near shave of being turned into a superior kind of sandwich paste."

"The devil you have," I gasped, and heard him chuckle.

"My own fault entirely," he admitted. "All due to asking too many questions in the local inn and not keeping an eye skinned when I drove on up the road to Rakovsky's villa. A very pretty avalanche of rock crashed down on the track, not five yards ahead of me, and if my brakes hadn't been working, it would have been far worse for me. As it was, I found I'd struck a boulder that knocked a hole in the oil-pump. Even temporary repairs will take the devil of a time, and I'll be nearly midnight before I'm on the road again, so you'll have to do your conferencing without me."

I strolled back to Dunning. "We're resolved into a committee of two," I informed him. "Hugo's spent the last two days running around after this precious Amouris." I added, "and what good it will do us when he finds it the Lord may know, but I certainly don't."

He looked at me oddly. "I'm not so sure of that," he said. "Am I right in supposing that you encountered an Arab on the quay last night and gave him a job to do? Well, he did the job very nicely. He followed your fingerless friend out along the lefty. Our gentleman gave her, on the spot, a good sharp Rendevous, and for the moment it seemed he was going aboard. The yacht was dark except for her riding-lights, and the rope was across her gangway, but he gave a hail and presently a head bobbed up. 'Master aboard,' says he, 'words to the effect, but the head shook itself. 'Oh, well,' says he, 'if he wants his news, he must cross the border to it. I can't wait.'"

"My henchman trailed him to the place by the town hall where the cars are parked, and he saw his man half by a big limousine. He nattered up and 'Nice carrot, sar,' says he. 'Go to Hades,' said the other, but our Arab hung onto his arm, pleading with him and all the time, under cover of the car's nets, his other hand was busy in the fellow's pockets. Next minute he received a well-placed kick but by that time he'd got what he was after, and here it is." And with that he tossed a small rather battered roll of paper at my feet.

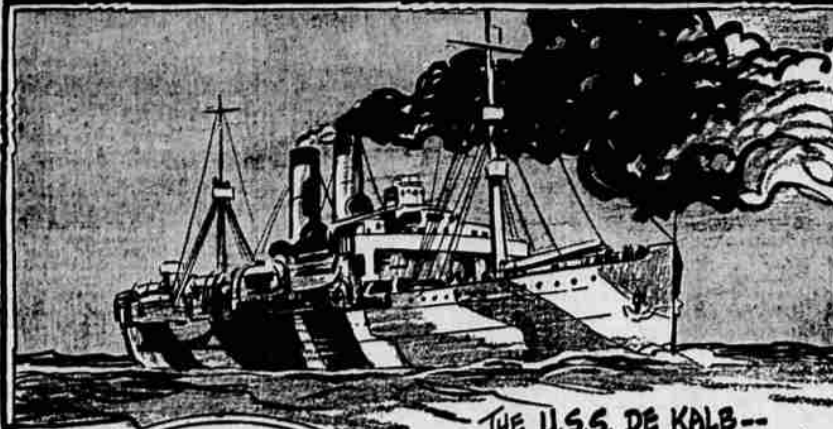
I picked it up and gingerly withdrew the crumpled twist of paper that it contained, but as I spread it out and stared at the single word roughly printed upon it, once again I felt that old, hopeless sinking of the heart. "L.A.M. used."

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Tomorrow: Breaking and entering

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



THE U.S.S. DE KALB--
Allied World War transport,
MADE 11 TRIPS TO FRANCE
CARRYING AMERICAN SOLDIERS
AFTER HER CRANKSHAFT
HAD BEEN CUT 1/2 THROUGH
BY GERMAN SABOTAGE

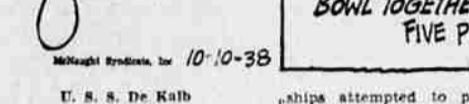
THE FACT WAS NOT DISCOVERED
UNTIL AFTER THE WAR...

ONE GLASS MARBLE--
3/4-INCH IN DIAMETER,
CAN BE DRAWN INTO A
THREAD OF GLASS
150 MILES LONG!

FLORAL CLOCK--
Fort Lincoln Cemetery,
Washington, D.C.,
IS COMPLETELY DECKED
IN FLOWERS...



BROTHER BOWLING TEAM--
HARRY, JAMES, GEORGE, DAVID, AND ALLAN HADAWAY
BOWL TOGETHER IN THE WEST TORONTO (Canada)
FIVE PIN BOWLING LEAGUE...



U. S. S. De Kalb
Strange as it seems on the strength of a pounding crankshaft saved four-fifths through by German sabotage hung the fate of thousands of American soldiers who crossed the Atlantic on the U. S. S. De Kalb during the World War.

Formerly the North German Lloyd liner, "Prinzess Hittel Frederick," built in 1904, 15,000 gross tons, the De Kalb was one of 120 German ships interned in the United States at the outbreak of the war with Germany.

The skeleton crews aboard these ships attempted to put them out of commission so that they would be rendered unfit for transport service—at least until Germany had time to gain an advantage in the conflict.

The United States Navy Department consequently found itself with the task of repairing smashed cylinder heads, scored bearings and other mechanical defects resulting from the sabotage.

Strange as it seems, a complete going over of the De Kalb refused to disclose anything wrong with her, so she was placed into transport service and made 11 successful crossings to France, carrying thousands of "doughboys" to the Big War.

Confident that all was well, men and officers alike were blissfully unaware that the pounding vibrating crankshaft that drove them through the ocean waters was ready to shear off at any moment.

Not until the end of the war was the damage discovered—the Germans had craftily sawed four-fifths of the way through the shaft and filled the cut with grease to hide it!

Tomorrow: Why did Emperor Tiberius wear a laurel wreath in a thunderstorm?

Nelson Gets Time
COQUILLE, Oct. 10.—(AP)—Henry Stanley Nelson, Portland salesman sentenced to nine years in prison for manslaughter, was granted 30 days in which to petition for a new trial yesterday when his attorney, George Mowry, appeared before Circuit Judge J. T. Brand.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

Held For Auto Theft
SALEM, Oct. 10.—(AP)—Three men charged with grand larceny in connection with the theft, riddling with bullets, burning and sinking in the Willamette river of an automobile, were held here today.

Contended rail wages were advanced in 1920 because of large increases in the cost of living after 1916. Fort also challenged comparisons of wage averages 18 years ago with those of today because "they were computed in a different manner."

Earlier, George M. Harrison, speaking for a group of railroad brotherhoods, contended the works had public opinion behind them in their opposition to the wage cut.

H. A. Enoch, last of the management witnesses, told the board carriers were willing to be bound by arbitration under the federal railroad mediation act to settle the dispute, but the brotherhoods declined.

Tails Spin Tommy is getting out of his claws. Now folks, and coming over.

Ben Webster's Career—He'll Spill Everything!

The Nebbs—Yes Indeed

Present Railway Wage Level Same as in 1920, Claim

Best M. Jewell, president of the American Federation of Labor's railway employees' department, made his statement in opening labor's case before the emergency fact-finding board seeking to avert a nationwide railway strike.

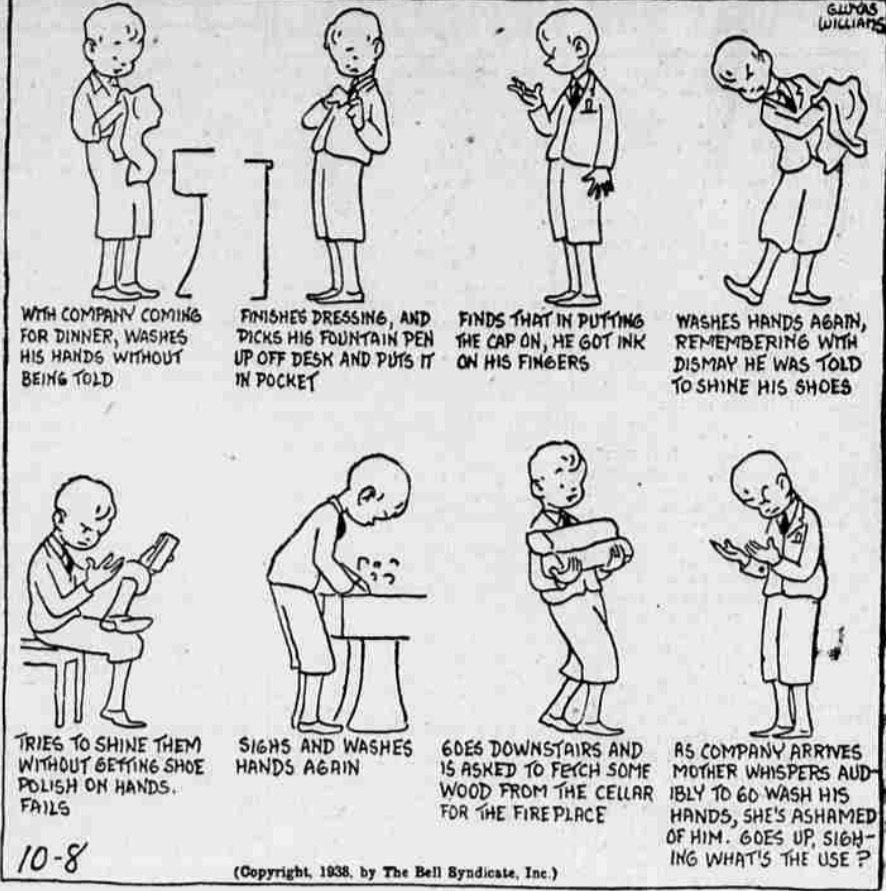
Almost 1,000,000 rail workers voted to strike recently when their employers ordered a 15 percent wage reduction.

Jewell told the board, appointed by President Roosevelt, present pay scales "are substantially the same as those established in 1920 by a government board."

J. Carter Fort, counsel for the rail-

NO USE

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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SMATTER POI

By C. M. PAYNE



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TAILSPIN TOMMY—And Tommy's Life Hangs in the Balance!

By HAL FORREST



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BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—He'll Spill Everything!

By EDWIN ALGER



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THE NEBBS—Yes Indeed

By BOI HESS



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PRESENT RAILWAY WAGE LEVEL SAME AS IN 1920, CLAIM

WASHINGTON, Oct. 10.—(AP)—Present railway wage levels, labor leaders testified today, are nearly the same as in 1920.