

Synopsis for "Blackmail Under Glass"
by Michael Delving

In 1942, three documents are handed by mysterious couriers to the representatives of the British Government, the French President and the German Prime Minister (oddly enough, Adolph Hitler's not in power). As we watch the delivery to the British leader, we discover it's not Winston Churchill, but Neville Chamberlain. The document turns out to be a blackmail demand from J. Edgar Hoover, threatening to expose certain high British officials in a sex scandal.

Chamberlain consults with King Edward (who is still on the throne). The King's official consort, The Lady Wallis Simpson, suggests they turn to the only man that can help them, the one man who miraculously helped them before (when Edward almost lost his crown over his love for Lady Simpson). That man is...

...in a bar in New Orleans, watching a jazz band with a great young black piano player. The piano player gets heckled by two burly white men who threaten to beat him up, until our hero intervenes. He is Arthur Port, a lanky mid-40s detective who disdains the use of guns, but doesn't mind getting in the way of bullies. These two turn out to work for the FBI, but there's no love lost between Arthur and the Bureau. He leaves the two agents barely conscious and leads the blind piano player, young Ray Robinson, to safety.

The safest place in New Orleans is, coincidentally, Arthur's apartment, where dozens of 'friends' happen to be sacked out on the floor. The only awake house guest is Arthur's bodyguard/companion, Marion Morrison (an out of work stunt man). While Arthur fixes breakfast for Ray, he notices an article in the paper about an investigation over missing funds from the French treasury. But before he can get too involved, a visitor invites him to a meeting with one of the leaders of a Chicago 'family.'

Big Sal Sarzana runs an organization not too hard to imagine. But all his muscle won't bring his kidnapped child Sam back. Sam's being held in a gorgeous plantation outside of town, and after witnessing Arthur's performance at the nightclub, Sal decides Arthur's the man to get his beloved child back.

Arthur proves his abilities when he gets to Sam without firing a shot, only to discover that 'Sam' is actually Samantha Sarzana, young, beautiful and quite headstrong. Her captor is a young playboy friend, and the kidnapping is more play than anything else. Arthur returns to Big Sal with the news, and turns down Sal's request to 'look after' his girl. But when he returns to the apartment with "a helluva story" to tell Marion, he finds Samantha is already there, along with a representative from His Majesty's Government. Despite a heartfelt letter from Lady Simpson, Arthur is not inclined to take their job. He leaves to think more clearly, with Samantha tagging along. They run into the two FBI agents (and two buddies) at a local restaurant, and after another brawl, one of the agents mutters a warning to stay out of the Bureau's business.

That's all Arthur needs. He decides to take the job just to show the FBI he's not afraid of them

Soon, he and Samantha (now his inseparable companion) arrive in London, and discover the FBI has been using a small resort in Alsace-Lorraine, nicknamed 'The Love Nest,' to spy on and photograph less discreet member of the three governments. Arthur and Sam (with phony credentials supplied by the British) pop over to the Continent to check it out for themselves. They expose the FBI's undercover operation and discover Hoover's reasons for the scheme: he believes America is threatened by the alliance between France, England and Germany, and wants to create a division between them.

We glimpse Hoover in his office, receiving a coded transmission from an inside party in England, warning that Chamberlain has brought in an outside party to help. Hoover orders his London agents to stop Arthur.

Arthur's next move is to check in with an old buddy in London who used to work for the Bureau, back when he and Arthur linked up to put a young rabble rouser named Adolph into jail for the attempted overthrow of the German government (which explains why World War II never happened). Arthur's friend, John Drake, tells them to check out another ex-agent in Chicago who supposedly got cashiered for making a joke about Hoover's private parties. He also gives them clues that help them discover who Hoover's inside man is. The traitor turns out to be Churchill himself! Without the War to thrust him into prominence, Churchill's energy has been spent heading up the 'loyal opposition' to Prime Minister Chamberlain's policies.

After dodging a hired assassin sent by Hoover, Arthur and Sam confront Churchill, who admits to a "minor indiscretion of youth." However, Arthur's determination to trap Hoover convinces Churchill to assist them. Churchill provides them with an official release to borrow an experimental long-range Spitfire, outfitted like a trainer with two inline seats, to get back to the States without FBI interference. But Arthur and Sam must dodge Hoover's claws once again, as carrier-borne Aircobras try to intercept the lone Spitfire. Arthur's patriotism prevents him from firing at his fellow Americans, so he flies at wave-top altitude, causing the pursuers' planes to catch water in their air intakes, stall and drop into the ocean.

Hoover learns of their narrow escape and eventual destination. He orders pressure on them increased.

Safely in Chicago, Arthur and Sam stop by to visit her father, then meet up with the other ex-FBI agent in a safe public location: Wrigley Field, where the Cubs' latest acquisition, Ted Williams, is the new hero. The agent, Phil Anderson, recounts his joke about Hoover's private parties, and his subsequent forced retirement. Anderson provides the address where

the parties take place, and Arthur and Sam head out, just as Williams belts a home run into the nearby bleacher seats.

The cabdriver they meet in the trendy Georgetown neighborhood knows exactly what address they're looking for, and takes them to a spot where they can photograph the goings-on. A bevy of heavy, formally dressed and decidedly unfeminine women mingle and carry-on. As the hostess appears briefly in front of the window, Arthur gets the shock of his life - it's Hoover himself! No wonder He's so paranoid!

With pictures in hand, Arthur and Sam head back to the French Quarter, only to find that while they were gone, some FBI agents had roughed up Ray. After making sure he's OK, Arthur, Sam and Marion take to the streets to get the agents responsible.

They trap one agent, Jake, and take him to a bayou tour boat owned by two cajun brothers. Hanging the agent by a yardarm over alligator-infested swamp water, Jake sings like a canary, spilling the goods about the Love Nest as well as providing further background on the Georgetown parties. But after letting Jake go, Arthur has second thoughts about using the pictures to blackmail Hoover. Arthur realizes that if he stooped to using their methods, he'd be no better than them.

Despondent, Arthur and Sam fly back to London, prepared to tell Chamberlain and the King that they'll have to shell out the blackmail money. But as Sam leafs through a forged Gutenberg bible in Chamberlain's office, Arthur has a bolt of inspiration. He quickly organizes needed support from the representatives of the English, French and German states, and prays that it all comes together in the few days they have left.

They hurry back to New Orleans, where Arthur calls on an old friend, Paul Kacoe, once the best forger in the States, but now a well-respected painter. After skillful negotiations (and a veiled threat to go to "someone better"), Arthur explains his plan. It seems that years ago, the original Lewis and Clarke expedition lost its only Journal of the trip in an accident near the end of their two-year journey. Under Arthur's direction, Paul takes a recently arrived ancient French book, together with 150-year-old German ink, and creates a second abbreviated Journal, written as a precaution and supposedly given to a passing French ship captain. But Arthur rips out the last page before pronouncing the finished book "a masterpiece."

The British contribution to the plot is a spot in the next Sotheby's New York auction, where Hoover's agents take the bait and steal the Journal. Later that day, Hoover donates the Journal to the Smithsonian, where it is displayed under lock and key - and heavily armed security.

Back at his office, Hoover gloats in victory, until he notices Arthur and Sam waiting in the shadows. Hoover boasts about his triumph, until Arthur plays his last trump: a photograph of the ripped-out page. The writing says that, in return for bringing the copied Journal to safety, the expedition would reaffirm French sovereignty over the part of the Northwest Territory that the U.S. didn't buy in the Louisiana Purchase. Arthur suggests that the French would probably be able to pay the blackmail money, if they owned Portland and Seattle.

Hoover is furious, and threatens to squash Arthur like a bug. But just as Hoover's temper approaches the boiling point, through his office door crashes a man in a wheelchair, pushed by a stately woman - Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt!

Speaking for her husband (who is nearly a paraplegic after a suspicious poisoning which she attributes to Hoover), Eleanor says that the President would support the French claims, unless Hoover backs down. And to add further indignity, she declares that from now on, Hoover will have the 'assistance' of an independent three-member Oversight Board.

Later, Arthur and Sam chat about their close call, as they prepare for a late afternoon trip around their new home. But Arthur releases the final bombshell: they didn't catch the real mover behind the plot. Sam is surprised when she hears the name - Churchill! Arthur caught a slipup when Churchill mentioned that his getting caught in the Love Nest was a "minor indiscretion of youth," though he was caught only a few years ago. It was Churchill's idea to use the special Spitfire, as well as supplying a contact at Sotheby's.

As confirmation, we watch as Churchill (back in London) reads a report on Arthur and Sam's final triumph over Hoover, then drops the report in his fireplace.

Arthur knows that Churchill used them both to get Hoover off his back once and for all. But Arthur is satisfied that the real evil, Hoover, has been stopped, at least for now. The movie ends as Arthur and Sam take off in their 'ride:' the special Spitfire, given to them by a grateful British crown.

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