

BOMBS BURST ONCE

By GRANVILLE CHURCH

W.N.U. SERVICE

THE STORY SO FAR: Jeff Curtis and his wife, Lee, are on their way to Tierra Libre when Jeff receives a note from Zora Mitchell warning them not to come. Jeff is to be chief engineer for a newly organized, fruit company. They arrive in Tierra Libre to find both Zora Mitchell and her husband dead, and Jeff suspects they were murdered. He learns from Jerry McInnis, a former associate who works for a rival fruit company, that there is something strange going on and that Mitchell and Zora were killed because they knew too much. A conversation with his employer, Senor Montaya, confirms Jeff's suspicions. Montaya shows him pictures of Zora's body. Her fingers, holding a German gun, are not tightly clasped, as they would be if she had pulled the trigger herself.

NOW CONTINUE WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER V

On his way home to lunch Jeff's step was springy as a boy's. As he let the gate slam behind him, Buddy and Chuck jumped from ambush behind the hedge. This brought about a free-for-all on the lawn until the resultant bedlam made Lee, watching from the screened livingroom-veranda, put fingers to her ears.

"Hey, Man-mountain!" she called to Curt. "You're worse than the boys. You know better, they don't. We have neighbors, remember."

Curt snatched up the youngsters to march inside.

"Lunch ready? I'm starved."

"Yes, but you!" she eyed him sorrowfully. "Look at you. Your only fresh whites! You look like a street cleaner on a rainy day."

Curt chuckled and pulled her to him.

"Well, you didn't marry a glamour boy. Anyway, I won't need these again for a while. I'm making the first round this afternoon, so get out my boots and field clothes. And pack my old musette bag for overnight. Won't be back till sometime tomorrow."

During lunch Curt was full of the job ahead of him, but the meal was nearly over before he realized Lee hadn't been listening with the proper enthusiasm. That pucker had returned to her forehead and it brought back a string of questions to his own mind. He paused to give her a chance.

"About Zora Mitchell, Jeff," she began.

"Yes," Curt set down his glass of iced tea, carefully. "I saw photographic evidence this morning. They took pictures when they found her. I reckon it's pretty conclusive." He tried to speak lightly.

She was silent a moment.

"But her child, so little and all alone. I kept thinking all morning what if it were Bud—" Lee bit her lip. "Don't you think, Jeff, we could take her until arrangements are made to send her north?"

"A swell idea, Lee! I should've thought of it myself. They're looking after her at the hospital nursery. I'll speak to Montaya this afternoon."

Curt reached the San Alejo station before Montaya, equipped for the field on this first tour of the C. A. T. tract.

He kept his promise to Lee, raising the subject of the Mitchell child before they set out.

Montaya studied the ash forming on the end of his cigarette. Why so much deliberation, Curt wondered, over so simple a matter? He frowned. At length Montaya spoke.

"I have been unable yet to locate the relatives. According to our records there are only two—sisters of Mrs. Mitchell, and they—ah, travel in theatrical work. It will take time to make arrangements. If Mrs. Curtis will be so kind, then. The child is not happy at the nursery."

As they rolled down the mountainside Curt had a better view of the airfield than from the unexpected glimpse of it the day before.

Again today Curt noted the length of the field, but at once realized a long runway was necessary for heavily loaded planes. His eyes traveling down the wide strip caught a glimpse, but hardly more than that, of what seemed to be a duplicate set of buildings at the far end. They were shaded by the big copse of trees left standing there, but at that end of the field the grass was grown, there was no runway. Evidently these buildings were not in use—at least as hangars.

However, along the barely visible front of the buildings ran a platform breast high, and serving this platform was a spur track leading from the airfield branch. Curt would have missed the platform if the track hadn't suggested it.

"A bodega?" he asked, and before realizing the impertinence he was offering, "Funny place for it."

But Montaya was not offended. He gave a short, deprecatory laugh.

"My reason for locating them where I did was to take advantage of those trees for the comfort of the men. It is so very hot on the field. A good idea, no?"

Curt thought he detected a sardonic overtone and waited for the other to go on.

"Then arrived my aviators. They showed me that the wind is bad for that location. And the wind here never varies much. So," Montaya spread his hands, there was no steering. "I built new hangars at the upper end of the field, the site they selected."

"And the old buildings?"

"I will tear them down when I need the materials. Meanwhile, they serve as a bodega. I have some choice stocks of rosewood and hard mahogany curing there. And ciruelillo. Also much pipe and pump machinery which I was able to pick up very cheaply in bankrupt sales. One must save where one can. For the overhead irrigation system we install later. I shall send you the inventory for your perusal."

Twice on the run Curt stopped Montaya to inspect the work of ballasting in progress. On the second stop, where a crew was cribbing a section of the roadbed and installing a culvert, he found the engineer in charge was a man he'd known previously in Tierra Libre.

Bill Henderson was a lanky, happy-go-lucky individual, with a mop of sandy hair burnt by tropic sun. His skin was like leather, his eyes so straight and pale that they made him seem to stare. But for all his rough exterior, he had a sheepish air in greeting Curt.

"Hiya, fella," Henderson grinned amiably, it might have been only



"Uh, no, Curt, I cut up a bit one night."

yesterday they last met. "Heard you were coming."

"So, Bill, you finally broke away from Associated. You threatened to often enough."

"Well, uh, guess it was the other way around, Curt. They broke loose from me."

"How come?"

"Oh, reckon I went on one too many benders."

"What! Have they gone Sunday School on us over there?"

"Uh, no, Curt. I cut up a bit one night."

"Oh."

Curt surveyed the other. Under Henderson's open shirt were spots and blotches of dull red forming a solid blemish on the skin, ending jaggedly at the collarbone. Curt remembered that Henderson had always been too lazy to treat this skin fungus.

But there was something decidedly peculiar in Henderson's manner, in his careful words. The man didn't have to be on good behavior with Curt. He'd never been so restrained in the old days. Perhaps Montaya's silent presence threw a damper on the meeting. Curt commenced to stuff his pipe absently.

"So you crossed the river! Should've gone home. How you doing now?"

"Oh, I've been off the stuff for some time."

"Shake on that, Bill." Nothing wrong with his grip, thought Curt, winning. "Tell you what, when you feel the urge again, look me up before you start in. I'll see you don't go too far. Anyway, we'll have to have a get-together soon for old time's sake. Come up to San Alejo. Lee will be glad to see you again."

"Sure, Curt, thanks."

Inspecting the job in hand, questioning the capacity of that size culvert, passing a few more words, took twenty minutes. Montaya took little or no part in the talk. Once Curt noticed the senior looking attentively from him to Bill Henderson, but gave it no thought.

On their way again Curt said, "Darn good worker, Bill Henderson. Only fault is he never could leave liquor alone. He can usually handle it, but it does him out of a future."

Montaya shrugged noncommittally.

They reached Tempujo by mid-afternoon. From here they'd take a power launch up the river to the main levee camp. First, however, Montaya led the way down the ridged asphalt footpath to the Tempujo engineering office.

Half of this building, all one side of it, was a single large room with almost continuous windows in three walls. Here was drafting equipment, engineering instruments.

An intelligent-looking native, at present tracing maps, was in charge of the office. Lauriano Duro bowed stiffly when introduced, then went on with his work.

While Montaya selected a couple of maps to take along on their trip upriver, he explained, "We maintain a duplicate set of our important drawings here, Mr. Curtis. This serves two purposes, convenience and insurance against fire."

Curt nodded approvingly.

The other half of the building was further divided. A screened porch in front was combination livingroom and outer office. In back of this was a small bedroom. Through an open door on the other side of the bedroom Curt could see a shower cubicle.

"This you will find most convenient when your work holds you at this end of the planting," Montaya remarked. "You use the mess-hall for meals."

Curt grinned. "Good enough!" They had thought of everything here.

The old Tempujo radio shack at the river dock now housed the dispatcher and his small switchboard that served Tempujo. Here ended the two telephone lines from San Alejo, one used by the dispatcher, one for general utility. They still maintained the radio, too, against emergency. Montaya entered this office to talk with San Alejo before leaving for the levee camp. Curt strode about outside.

The dock hoist was lifting a huge case from the deck of a river steamer. It was one of the crated airplane wings Curt had seen in the wharf shed at Cabeza.

Rising up over the edge of the wharf, it loomed even bigger than Curt had thought, bigger than necessary for the plane he'd seen on the ground at the airfield that afternoon.

The Negro rolled swift, even at this season, obliging the launch to fight its way upstream. When they reached the ever-moving camp of the levee gang it was too late to go out on the job that night. After a wash-up, Montaya and Curt busied themselves with maps and progress reports in the office tent, until the fast-obliterating darkness drove the construction gang into camp.

Again Curt found an old friend among these workers.

"Slats!" he called to the bulky man pushing his feet wearily down the camp road. "I'll be damned!"

"Hello, Curt! Glad you're on the job. It'll seem like old times again."

"Has all the old guard left Associated, Slats?"

"No. We've got a number over here, but I reckon you won't know many of 'em. Myself and Bill Henderson—"

"Yeh, met him."

"—and Steve Harvey, and Lawson . . . well, only us, I guess, from the old days."

Slats, naked to the waist, his dirty shirt slung across his shoulder, a filthy hat pushed back until sweat-soaked hair escaped in a tangle, showed strong teeth as he smiled, teeth yellow with tobacco stains. But for all the friendliness of the grin, he seemed uneasy.

Montaya stood nearby. Again Curt caught a thoughtful look in the Spaniard's eyes. Or was it speculative? At any rate, the look vanished as Montaya said, "Mr. Harvey and Mr. Lawson are on the drainage laterals."

To Monahan Curt said, "Slats, how come so many of you left Associated?"

"Oh," Monahan replied hesitatingly, "they started pinching pennies for one thing, and Senor Montaya pays good wages." Then, as though he hadn't said enough, "Besides, this's a new planting, and you know how most of us feel about a new job. It's more fun building than maintaining."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

AROUND THE HOUSE

To keep bread in the best condition, store it when cool in a clean, well-aired, covered, ventilated container and keep in a cool, dry place.

To protect garden shoes keep them well greased or oiled with neat's-foot oil or cod or castor oil, tallow or wool grease. Let dry in a warm place.

Sheets and other linens should be ironed in different folds each week so the creases will not break through.

Sweet corn, green string beans, green peas, pumpkins, squash, celery and greens are best vegetables for home drying. Apples and berries are adapted to drying in the home among fruits.

That fish may be sealed much easier by first dipping them into boiling water for a minute.

Rancidity in lard can be prevented by keeping it away from air, light and warmth. Store in tin or crockery containers in a cool place.

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