Montana Rides Again

A RAPID-FIRE ROMANCE BY EVAN EVANS

SYNOPSIS: The Montana Kid and Brother Pascual have deliberately walked into the clutches of the terrible Juan-Silva, master of the Valley of the Dead. Mateo Rubrio has been condemned to die in the valley, and Montana and Pascual hope to rescue him. Montana has been tested and Juan-Silva is about to accept him as a guard. But first he must prove himself by defeating three huge geese, locked in a dark room, with only a machete for a weapon.

Chapter 35

BLACK DEATH

"AFTER you have stripped El Keed and given him his machete, give each of the three prisoners a machete," went on Juan Silva. "Tell them El Keed will meet them in the dark of the room.

"Thrust them in to him. Feed them to this puma—this mountain lion. Tell them that if he dies, they shall not be prisoners; they shall be guards."

In a dark room—armed with a heavy machete only—to encounter three blood-thirsty peons who had been raised to the use of that weapon—to struggle with three men who had something better than life to fight for?

The Kid turned a little towards old Juan-Silva, not to appeal, but to curse the unquenchable bloodthirst of the tiger.

But Juan-Silva was already reclining on his mat, thrusting his legs out into the terrible heat of the sun and groaning with pleasure. He had closed his eyes. Already, perhaps, he had forgotten his last commands. Cursing and pleading alike would mean nothing to him.

So it was in silence that Montana moved away, surrounded by his guards.

The captain of them moved with a short gait, almost mincing his way like a dancing boy, and as he went he sang huskily.

He kept on singing the song to the end, but a great laughter began to interrupt him and choke away his voice. The rest of the guards joined in the mirth, but softly, with a sound like the humming of a hive.

They brought up three men from the fields.

Big Montana, in the meantime, was stripped and given a pair of the unbleached cotton shorts. He was given a machete, too, the heavy knife widening towards the point to make its stroke more effective in mowing down cane or rushes.

He gripped it and weighted it. Among the natives, he knew, the science of machete play had been cultivated almost to the point of small-sword fencing. And he, for the first time in his life, was holding the weapon!

He looked over the three. They were all big. Vidal—Leon—Garcias—they were named to him by the captain of the guard, who chuckled as he spoke their names.

They were big, and the brute was written all over them. Not for minor offenses had they been sent to the Valley of the Dead. And they had remained long enough in the place to have in their eyes contempt for death compared with their horror of the life they had been enduring.

THE marks of the chains were on their necks and ankles, now for the moment made free from weight. The bitter labor had rubbed away from their bodies all spare flesh. And each man knew machete-play. Each had in his eyes a light brighter than that which flickered over the keen edges of the knives, while they measured the Kid as a butcher measures a beef.

In full daylight, any one of the three, he knew, would have been more than a match for him at this game.

But Juan-Silva preferred a hugger-mugger frightfulness in the dark. He would lie yonder on his mat and smile and taste his own cruelty in the back of his throat.

The gray-headed captain was saying: "You three get in there. El Keed first. When the three of you are done for, El Keed will rap on the wall and we'll come in to see what's happened. Or if the three of you finish him, shout, and you're free from the chains. No more of the sleep-house, you hear me? No more of the spoiled beans and cabbage, but meat that a man can eat. Do you hear me tell you?"

Hear him? They grinned on one another, open-mouthed, and suddenly they joined hands, nodding. The Kid understood that gesture. They would remain linked together by the hands so that none of them might fall foul of another by mistake, in the darkness. They would have more than united defense—they would have the strength of companionship in the thick blackness.

"Go in first! El Keed first! This is El Keed, friends. This is the gringo. If you have heard of him before, let Mexicans be able to forget about him today."

The door opened slowly, because it was a weight even with the hands of two men pulling at it, and as the light entered, the Kid walked into a big, round chamber that might have been a tank built to hold water. There was no feature of interest in its construction.

On one side it was exactly as on another, except that the wall had been built up of great thickness only for some eight feet of its height, after which a lighter wall went up to the roof, leaving a deep shelf that ran all around the compartment.

"Now!" barked the voice of the gray-head, and as the great door closed, Montana looked behind him and saw, as the light pinched out, that the three were coming for him in a rush, their bare feet whispering on the stone floor.

He fled. The closing of the door left him in utter darkness. Then he turned and dropped to one knee, one hand, with the machete poised over his right soulder.

But the whisper of the footfalls did not sweep straight up on him. They paused, a little to his left. Then silence followed. He could see nothing, but he thought that he could feel a pressure on his brain from their approach.

Tiptoe, three cats in the dark, they could hunt him by scent, perhaps. They had looked near enough to the beast for that!

THE thick of the dark was a weight, a steady weight. And he felt his eyeballs starting out of his head with strain.

Thne he remembered that his eyes were useless. He might as well close his eyes, so he closed them. Sense of touch would have to serve him, completely.

But in the meantime, three stalking devils were moving through the darkness to find him, find him they must, sooner or later. Spread out in a line, they could not fail to make contact with him, and at the first touch three machetes would fall to work. He might strike down one of them, but the other two would be certain to bury the heavy, razor-sharp blades in him.

He could feel the pain—the nausea of it.

And if he fled, the noise of his feet would bring them all the more swiftly on him.

He rose and drew back, little by little. When he touched the wall, something went by him, breathing. It was barely audible, but the sound could be heard, nevertheless. The three of them had moved slowly by. It was like magic: three huge men could not pass in such a silence!

Loathing which was greater than fear was driving him now. But he told himself that there was time. It would be minutes before the line of the three returned to this same spot.

He reached behind him and gripped the edge of the stone shelf above him. He laid the machete on it, stepped a pace away from it, then freshened his grip on the ledge with both hands.

Slowly—he must not make a sound—he muscled himself up. When his shoulders were level with his hands he swung a leg over the edge of the shelf and stretched himself out prone.

There must be no sound, but his lungs were bursting with the effort which he had just made. There seemed to be no oxygen in the hot, thick, stale air as he mastered his breathing.

His whole body shook. The pangs of strangling made him gape his mouth wide open, but he fought back the panic until, little by little, drawing only small, quick, unwhispering breaths, he was almost normal again.

There was not room for his entire body to lie in any comfort and security. A part of his width projected, and when the searchers thought to feel along the ledge he would be found instantly.

That thought made him want to leap down at once, regardless of any telltale noise he would make. But the idea which had entered his mind sustained him. He kept his eyes closed. Three men in the dark, and as a blind man he must master them!

He began to work off the short trunks in which he was dressed.

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Monday, the terrible battle begins.

BABY DOE TABOR PASSES IN SHACK

LEADVILLE, Colo., March 8.—(AP)—Mrs. Elizabeth (Baby Doe) Tabor was found dead in her cabin at the Matchless mine here.

She was the widow of H. A. W. Tabor, famous as a Colorado multi-millionaire mining man and U. S. senator many years ago.

Her exact age was unknown, but she was past 70.

The body, Coroner James Corbett said, was discovered by Thomas French, who lives a short distance away from the famed Matchless mine, which helped to build the huge Tabor fortune and which the aged widow, once the toast of Denver and Washington society, had hoped would restore her finances.

Proud and declining to accept aid from friends, she chose instead to live in the dilapidated shack at the mine.

When Senator Tabor married the beautiful Baby Doe, President Arthur and his cabinet came to their wedding in Washington.

Narro Squeak.

MOBERLY, Mo.—(UP)—He had a bad heart, a Moberly gentleman feared. At least, something squeaked every time he took a deep breath. The doctor looked him over and pronounced him sound, but suggested he put some oil on a little pulley on his patent suspenders.

One Family Team.

HOLCOMB, Mo.—(UP)—The Rollins brothers, Willis, Lester, Deven, Curtis and Harry, are a one-family basketball team. A sixth brother serves as mascot, and father, mother and three sisters take care of the cheering. The boys are undefeated in this region.

Wisconsin's Last G. A. R.

MANITOWOC, Wis.—(UP)—Charles Frederick William Rieg, 88, Centerville, ho ran away at the age of 15 to join the Union forces, today is the last Civil war survivor in Manitowoc county. Rieg is an accomplished musician.

Dance till 1 o'clock at the Oasis every Saturday night. 23tc

PRESENT TOREADORS OPERA IN APPLEGATE NEXT SATURDAY NIGHT

Because so many Applegate students took part in the "Toreadors" two-act operetta given last Friday night at the Jacksonville gym, it will be presented again at the Applegate Grange hall Saturday, March 9, at 8 p. m.

The school gymnasium was filled to capacity for what was considered the most successful production ever given by the Jacksonville school. A record was broken in gate receipts, which almost doubled any at school before.

Among Applegate students taking principal parts in the Toreadors are Frank Mee and Henry Head. Henry takes the part of a beggar masquerading as a toreador, while Frank plays the part of a lover. Ten other students from the Applegate have chorus parts. They include Gladys Byrne, June Peebler, June Provolt, Alice Madson, Eileen Berry, Iola Fields, Lois Matheny, Marion Roberts, Jack Provolt and Bud Peebler.

Following the operetta, the grange will hold a dance.

ROOSEVELT PLANS VISIT SAN DIEGO EXPOSITION

WASHINGTON, March 8.—(AP)—President Roosevelt today told a congressional delegation he hoped to attend the California Pacific International exposition at San Diego this summer as he signed a bill authorizing $350,000 for federal participation in the event.

The exposition starts May 29, but Mr. Roosevelt left the date open for his expected trip.

BIRTHS

Born to Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Mahaffey of route 4, a baby girl weighing six pounds, Tuesday night at the Community hospital.

SPOKANE, Wash., March 8.—(AP)—The Chronicle said today that "plans of the United States government virtually to take control of the lumber industry" are being resisted by the 1400 operators in the 12 western states affiliated with the Western Pine association.

"Factory style" workmanship in watch and jewelry repairing at the lowest possible prices. Johnson the Jeweler.

BAN HAUPTMANN FUND SOLICITING

NEW YORK, March 8.—(AP)—Solicitations for the appeal fund for Bruno Richard Hauptmann, under sentence to die for the murder of the Lindbergh baby, were ordered stopped today.

Acting Commissioner of Public Welfare Stanley H. Howe said he had ordered Mrs. Anna Hauptmann, wife of the condemned man, and her appeal fund campaign manager, David Webber, to end all public appeals for funds and withdraw any fund boxes that might have been set up in public places.

"Such activities," he said, "are a clear violation of the city code which provides against such solicitations."

See Maison Jeanne for things that wear. Dependable quality is what she has there.

SUBURBAN HEIGHTS By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

S-MATTER POP— By C. M. Payne

TAILSPIN TOMMY—To Save a Nation—And a Life! By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—In Dire Peril!

THE NEBBS—Gone But Not Forgotten By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus