Montana Rides Again

A RAPID-FIRE ROMANCE BY EVAN EVANS

SYNOPSIS: Brother Pascual and the Montana Kid have deliberately walked into the grisly Valley of the Dead, hoping to rescue Mateo Rubrix, condemned to work himself to death in the valley. The terrible Juan-Silva, master of the valley, has devised a test to prove that Montana really is the Kid. He has had him locked in a dark room with three huge peons. All are armed with machetes. Montana, to live, must kill the other three. He has worked himself onto a ledge, and is removing his only garment, a pair of cotton shorts.

Chapter 39

MONTANA'S RUSE

REMOVING the shorts required minutes and minutes—an endless time—heaving himself up on one elbow and his knees, working the cloth down towards the ankles, sharpening his ears so that not a sound could be heard without first coming to his own senses.

But at last he had the cloth in his hand.

He lay on his left shoulder, in his left hand holding the cloth to the extent of that arm. In his right hand he kept the machete. And then he waited, with eyes closed.

His left arm began to grow numb. If that happened, his plan was lost, for it depended on delicacy of touch. No stir of wind would move that hanging cloth. It was to Montana as the main spy-thread on which the spider keeps her foot for news of anything that touches her web.

Feeling was fast leaving his left arm. He kept flexing his left hand from time to time. And his eyes were closed. To attempt to see in utter night would only make him strike astray when the time came.

The cloth pulled slightly in his hand. He hesitated, perhaps for the thousandth part of a second, and then struck with all his might. A dropping weight almost pulled the knife from his hand, but he wrenched it free.

"Diablo!" a man had gasped.

He reached far out and struck at the sound. The machete shore through flesh.

And a man screamed, short and sharp.

"Vidal!—Garcias! he has seen in the dark! Vidal!"

"Vidal!" said another voice. Then "Vidal is gone—it was he that dropped——"

"My God, I am killed, Garcias!"

"Hush! Fool—fool—the noise—"

But already, under cover of those voices, Montana was down from the shelf.

He stepped softly away from the voices. He lay on the floor, stretched out flat, the machete gripped in his right hand over his head.

The cool of the floor turned instantly hot with his body. He was sweating all over, and the air was thicker and staler than ever. He had a frenzied second of thinking that it would be death by suffocation merely to remain in the room.

Then he took hold of himself and cast the panic away.

That man he had struck through the skull—that Vidal—he was dead; and another was badly wounded—Leon that would be. There remained Garcias. Well, it was for Garcias that he lay stretched along the floor.

HIS mind stretched back to old Juan-Silva. Perhaps it would be better to die here, mangled with the strokes and the savage thrusts of a machete, than to go out to face that terrible old man again. All that he could think of was the stiff, hard folds of the dried skin, and the voice like the sound of a death rattle.

A wild yell beat through the room; the echoes of it crowded back from the walls.

"I am dying! I die! Mercy in the name of God! Mercy in the name of God——!"

Hands began to beat on the wall.

"Give me light to die by! Give me one ray of light—light—light!"

The voice went up into a wordless screeching. It changed to a gasping, a choking sob.

Would they open the door when they heard the beating of those hands?

But Montana lay still and made every nerve in his body alert, for perhaps, under cover of the dying man's noise, that Garcias was stepping swiftly here and there through the darkness, searching. He was the hugest of the three, the most perfect animal.

Something cold touched the knee of the Kid. He struck with the full weight of his arm, three feet above the floor.

"Dios!" gasped an indrawn voice.

A blow fell; steel shattered on the stone floor inches from the head of the Kid. The sparks leaped, died, showed him nothing. He had torn his blade free and struck again, swinging sidewise. He found nothing.

Something fell heavily on the floor.

He stood on tiptoe, the machete poised.

He stood for terrible seconds, waiting; and then he heard a queer groan.

That was all.

Behind him, Leon was silent at last.

He went to the wall and fumbled his way gradually around it. When, at last, he reached the inside of the door, he beat three great strokes on it with the butt of his machete.

The door quivered, opened a little.

A blasting ray of light struck through and almost blinded him.

"Who is it? Leon? Vidal?" called the voice of the gray-headed captain.

"El Keed," said Montana.

They jerked the door wide open. The sight of him seemed to shock them like a blow. He looked down and saw that he was naked.

"Here," he said to the captain, offering the weapon. "I'm finished with it."

THE "good" treatment of the friar when Juan-Silva had commended him to the keeping of his guards consisted in taking him to a long, low shed, where he was promptly stripped of his robe and clad in the cotton trousers which were the universal garb in the valley.

The chain was fitted to his ankles, the length of it running up to a steel collar that inclosed his neck, and as the blacksmith riveted it in place he laughed a good deal.

"A bigger neck was never fitted. Maybe the singing of psalms and chants has swelled it, brother, but a few days in the Valley of the Dead will make it shrink again."

Then they took him into the fields. With the wide straw sombrero to cover his head he was placed in a line of laborers.

Absently he worked, swaying the wide-bladed hoe, and forging ahead so far beyond the others that they began to curse him, because the overseers, shouting, began to drive the rest to keep them up with this tremendous pace-maker.

When the poor friar understood that he was the cause of this torment, he slowed his work. He became so conscientious in his efforts to stay in line that he actually dropped several times behind it, and received as a reward several strokes of the long-lashed whip.

The last of them, given with a certain drawing motion, cut his skin like a knife, and he felt the warm running of his blood as soon as the numbness of pain left his flesh.

He was not angered. It always seemed to Brother Pascual that the more pain we endure on earth, the nearer we have climbed to heaven. It was a doctrine which he would not preach to the simple mountaineers among whom he worked, because he felt that, after all, they have pain enough and need not be tormented by strange doctrines.

So he worked patiently through the day, with such a gentle and uncomplaining manner, that even the foul-faced criminals on either side of him began to look on him almost with kindness.

He was marched with the rest towards the sleep-house, at the close of the day. There all were taken through a certain ceremony.

In the first place—since uncleanliness may breed disease—they were driven like sheep through a river pool which soused them to the neck. After that they filed by a pile of tin cups, and past a big caldron filled with a sort of bean soup, thick, sour to the nose, unspeakable to the palate, and on top of the cup of beans was dropped a lump of black bread.

This small ration they had only a short time to eat, because the guards grew restless and wished to have the end of the day come at once. Accordingly, the whips began to snap before the last mouthful was down, and then the doors of the sleep-house were opened.

Strange things happened then. For Brother Pascual saw men bolt out of the line and scream that they would die then and there sooner than spend one more night in the hell-house.

One ardent example put an end to this nonsense.

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Tomorrow, Pascual sees Mateo.

BORAH DISPUTES RICHBERG CLAIM ON NRA EFFECTS

Can't Prove Small Business Not Harmed Declares Idahoan in Speech in Senate — Letters Are Read

By NATHAN ROBERTSON
Associated Press Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, March 9.—(AP)—A dispute over the effect of NRA, begun with the appearance of Donald Richberg before the senate finance committee, was carried to the senate floor today by Senator Borah (R., Idaho), who challenged the contention it had not harmed small business.

Borah took the senate floor to discuss the recovery law after Richberg and members of the committee had shot statistics and arguments at each other for two hours in an argument over whether NRA had been beneficial.

He cited Richberg's statement before the committee yesterday that the contention that small business had been harmed could not be sustained because figures showed the number of business failures was dropping.

"The question is not so simple as that," Borah said. "You can not determine the effect of NRA on small business by statistics."

Previously, Richberg has warned the committee that delays and uncertainly over NRA legislation were slowing up trade and industry.

Borah's speech was delayed a little, when Senator Glass (D., Va.) a long time critic of NRA, interrupted to call a quorum.

The Idaho senator had taken the floor during the lunch hour when only a few senators were in the chamber. Glass wanted more of them to hear Borah's reply to Richberg.

After the senators had filed into the chamber, Borah said:

"It is not alone a question of how many are actually driven out of business, but whether small business enterprise are compelled to live on the ragged edge of bankruptcy while the larger enterprises are enjoying vast profits.

"I have found only one code that adequately protected small business.

"In the other instance, the codes were framed by large business and enforced by large business and it is utterly impossible to prevent large business interests from really directing and controlling the course of business.

"The small business man is constantly struggling against bankruptcy, while the larger industries are enjoying as high as 200 and 260 per cent of net profits."

Borah read a number of letters which he said came in the mail this morning complaining against monopoly under NRA.

CHANGHAI, March 8.—(AP)—H. H. Kung, Chinese minister of finance, today characterized rumors that China is planning to abandon the silver standard and adopt a managed currency as "premature and ill-informed."

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

TRIAL OF INSULL LOSING INTEREST

CHICAGO, March 9.—(AP)—The court drama of "Samuel Insull Before the Bar," with the original cast practically intact, is losing its box-office pull.

Only 10 spectators viewed the embezzlement trial of Samuel Insull in criminal court yesterday, though a similar production "played" in federal court a few weeks ago to capacity houses.

The plot has been altered, so the defendant is now charged with embezzling $66,000 from the Middle West Utilities company. In the federal production, Insull and a cast of 16 executives were acquitted on charges of using the mails to defraud.

ARCHBISHOP OF S. F. RETIRES ACCOUNT AGE

SAN FRANCISCO, March 9.—(AP)—Edward J. Hanna, Roman Catholic archbishop of San Francisco since June 1, 1915, today announced his resignation because of advancing age.

The retiring archbishop will be 75 years old next July 21.

San Francisco church circles were surprised by the announcement, although it had been known some time that the aged church official was not in the best of health.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

THE FAMILY ALBUM—THE CAP OF THE TOOTH-PASTE TUBE By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

S-MATTER POP— By C. M. Payne

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Sweet Dreams Rudely Awakened! By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Tiger Loose! By Edwin Alger

THE NEBBS—The Braggart By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus

PINE BUSINESS ON HIGHER LEVEL

PORTLAND, Ore., March 9.—(AP)—New business amounting to 44,122,000 feet, 74 per cent greater than for the three-year weekly average for February was reported by the Western Pine association today for the week ending March 2. The volume was six per cent less than for the preceding week.

Shipments totaled 43,995,000 feet, and production was 26,040,000 feet. The same mills in the corresponding week last year showed orders of 34,688,000 feet and production of 25,197,000 feet.

For the period Jan. 1 to date orders are 62 per cent above the total for the corresponding period a year ago.

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

MEXICAN ARCHBISHOP IS REPORTED MISSING

MEXICO, D. F., March 9.—(AP)—Friends of Pasqual Diaz, archbishop of Mexico, who disappeared with three companions yesterday, expressed belief today he had been arrested or deported.

Police and government officials denied all knowledge of his whereabouts.

A night long search by Manuel Maria Carreno, the archbishop's secretary, failed to disclose any trace of the prelate.

China Tragedy

SAIGON, French Indo-China, Mar. 9.—(AP)—Eleven persons were killed and a number of others wounded in a boiler explosion today in a factory at Cholon, Cochin-China.

Ask the customers who have their watch repairing done here. Johnson the Jeweler.