

IN DUBIOUS BATTLE CONTINUED

Suzy Peters

(1) "Jim was a guy that gave all he had to guys like us." Mac's cold eyes glared at the crowd as their faces turned away from the body. The cold eyes of the organizer melted into a look of resignation.

(2) By this time London had climbed on stage. "You okay, Mac?" Mac gave no response; he only stared at the thinning crowd as they turned away from the bloody spectacle on stage. Slowly London chose his words: "We gotta get 'em goin', Mac. We can't just let the guys sneak outta here tonight."

(3) "You talk to 'em, London; without Jim backin' me, I can't do it. He was a real leader, and them damned vigilantes knew it, too!"

(4) "They was after all of us, Mac. We got 'em scared, cause they know we'd raise hell. Them vigilantes messed up real good this time."

(5) Mac's eyes turned steel grey, and the contours of his face turned harsh and cold, "I think they know what they was doin'. Better call a meeting; I'll go see what I can do 'bout burying Jim."

(6) "Mac, you know I can't make no speeches."

(7) "That's all right, half the camp will be cleared outta here by tomorrow anyhow. Them yellow bastards can't have any fight left in 'em anyways, and to be honest, I don't either."

(8) As the men crowded around to hear London talk, the air was filled with tension so powerful that it transformed every second into the tick of a time bomb. The helpless eyes seemed to be searching for a way to escape their misery and fear.

(9) As London stepped onto the now empty platform, the tense faces drew tighter. They wanted a simple answer to de-fuse this time bomb. London cleared his throat in an attempt to break the hypnotic spell of the crowd, now a spell of fear, not anger. Hesitantly, London started, "You guys know I can't make no speeches, so I'll say it plain and simple. We got to stick together." London stood for a moment, grasping for the right words to get the men going.

(10) The sound of Mac's voice came from the back of the crowd: "Don't think about leavin'. You see what they do. They'll shoot down your women and children along with you as soon as they get you out of a group. We gotta stick together, cause it's the only way we'll survive."

(11) Mac was now at the head of the crowd and had the attention of every fear-stricken face. "It's time us guys stop runnin'. Guys like my friends Jim and Joy were tryin' to make it safe for us. They died tryin' to get a decent and safe life for our women and kids. Nobody gives a damn about us, besides us. Scared of gettin' shot at? If they don't shoot us, they'll starve us!"

(12) By now a low grumble had lifted from the crowd as faces became alive and angry.

(13) "If guys like Jim gave it all for us, why can't we finally stand up to them money-grubbin' pigs? We got the power, proved that today. Let's show 'em we can't be run out like a bunch of cows to be killed. We ain't gonna be pushed around no more!"

(14) The crowd had become the animal again, entranced by the power of desperate fear turned into desperate rage.

(15) Mac sensed this and continued, "Now we can't be scared into doin' crazy things, cause that's what they want. We gotta stay close together tonight and wait. Tomorrow comes the test. Remember to wait for the mornin', it's our only chance to show them bastards we don't let nobody run our lives!" Mac turned towards London, "I just couldn't let him die for nothin'."

(16) The sun began to rise, but darkness still lay heavy in the pits of the men's empty stomachs. The dwindling campfires flickered glimpses of the worn leather faces of men destined for one purpose in life, to rebel. As they heard the sound of motors in the distance, the men started to form a mob. Mac pulled London aside.

(17) "Listen, London, as soon as these guys start fightin', I want you to get the hell outta here. Head for the place I told you about and give this to Harry. He'll tell you what to do from there."

(18) Mac pulled a letter out of his pocket and quickly reread it.

"Dear Harry:

"This is the guy I told you about. He can be very useful to the cause. I've seen him in action and he's a natural leader. He'll be able to relate best with the workers and throw suspicion off us. The only thing,

Harry, he's hot-tempered. We know those kind of guys run a dime a dozen, but he's still good for the cause.

"Sorry about his daughter and grandkid; they'll be out of your hair soon. Her husband will be calling for her. Try to understand.

"I have to finish up some business here and will be back as soon as possible.

Mac"

Mac placed the letter in the envelope and handed it to London.

(19) "I gotta leave now, London. Remember, leave when the fightin' starts, and I'll see you when I get back."

(20) London nodded, and with that Mac vanished.

(21) Sitting in the doorway of a boxcar, Mac closed his eyes and let every emotion and thought of the cause drift out of his mind. As he opened them he gazed into the now sunny sky; he was ready to see the part of this country that Jim had always wanted to stop and wonder at.

(22) Hours away from the orchards, Mac arrived at what seemed to be an endless sea of lush pastures. He walked for hours admiring how the blades of long grass swayed to every shift of the wind and how the birds hid in the green forest of grass. Towards evening Mac came to a river in which water bubbled and ran freely across smooth flat pebbles. Mac found a shady oak tree. He sat for hours watching the sun and water dancing across the stretch of river, and as the sun fell, Mac drifted into a long-awaited sleep.

(23) The next day, Mac walked through the countryside, admiring its beauty. But as night came, he was back on a train heading toward the jungles.

(24) As Mac passed his tobacco pouch around, he listened intently to a heated discussion about cotton growers cutting wages in half. One dark face complained, "We gotta go. S'pose we don't, then some other fellas will while we starve."

(25) "We'll starve anyways with them wages," argued another.

(26) Mac's hand turned the knob of the office door. As he went in Harry looked up. "Jesus, Mac, where have you been? Things have been really crackin' around here, and we really need you. The cotton growers have decided to cut wages in half."

(27) "I know, I've been down in the jungles getting the story."

(28) "Well, I just sent a new kid to the house. John. You'll like him, Mac, he's a real cool character, a young kid, kind of reminds me of Jim. I heard about him; too bad, we really needed him."

(29) Mac's features tensed. "Where's the new kid?"

(30) "At the house, Mac. You'd better get going, we've got to move on this thing."

(31) Mac had just stepped through the cottage door when he spotted the lean figure standing next to Dick. Dick smiled and said, "I see the same old Itch got to you."

(32) "Have any frosted cakes, pretty boy? I'm pretty hungry."

(33) "Go to hell. Mac, this is John Hanson."

(34) Mac turned towards the grey eyes of his new comrade. "Glad to meet you, John, Do you type?"