

Dice of Destiny

By Jackson Gregory



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(Continued from Last Issue.)

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Senor don Antonio de la Guerra, wealthy Spanish ranch owner on the American side of the Mexican border, is informed by his American attorney that a technical error has been found in his will. The senator signs a new document without reading it.

CHAPTER II—Teresa, only grandchild of the senator, finds evidence of a struggle in the library and her grandfather missing. The belief is that the senator has been carried across the border by Mexican rebels. Billy Stanway, Teresa's sweetheart, takes command of the situation and orders the servants and vaqueros to arm themselves.

CHAPTER III—Stanway, with twenty men, starts in pursuit of the rebels. They meet Eduardo Ramon Torre, kinsman of Teresa, who has been wounded, he claims, by the escaping rebels.

CHAPTER IV—Stanway loses the rebels' trail and returns to the hacienda. Teresa shows him the copy of the new will which she has found and which leaves all the property to Torre.

CHAPTER V—An emissary from the rebels arrives with the news that the senator is well and is being held for \$30,000 ransom. Torre tries to assume authority as the heir, but Stanway takes command of the situation.

CHAPTER VI—Dempston, the senator's lawyer, is brought to the hacienda at Stanway's order and is accused of having received pay from Torre for altering the senator's will.

CHAPTER VII—Torre, who has been detained under guard by Stanway, admits that he is responsible for the senator's disappearance. He demands \$30,000 to reimburse all claim to the estate and to return the senator unharmed. Refusal will mean the senator's death within 24 hours.

CHAPTER VIII—The hacienda is attacked in the night on a signal given by Torre from within. He is foiled in his attempt to escape. He shivers, and, taking up his candle, went his way back through the drawing room, with no word to Torre, with no glance even, for he feared that now he could not let his eyes go to the handsome, evil face and keep his hand back, and at last to Pedro's bedside.

Pedro, waiting for him impatiently, tried to lift himself upon an elbow, and falling in that turned his bright black eyes upon the American.

"What did she say, Josefa?" he asked quickly. "It is the master's key?"

"Yes, Pedro," answered Stanway dispiritedly. "But what is the use? She does not know what door it opens."

"But I know!" said Pedro brightly. "You know!" Stanway laid his hand on the wounded man's arm. "Tell me, quick!"

"When the master was young he lived in Spain, where the old master, his father, sent him to go to school. In the home there, bulided of stones like an old castle, senior, was a room where many times he was locked up by his tutor because he was wild and did not fall in love with his books. I have heard him laugh and tell about it to the padre from La Panza. When he came away he brought the key to that prison room with him. That is the key you have, senior!"

Stanway looked at the man with swift suspicion. Pedro seemed excited over the key; a look of great shrewdness was in his eyes, and the key unlocked a door in Spain! If he was becoming delirious—

"I am not in a fever, senior," said Pedro quickly, seeing the thought in the American's eyes. "But that key tells me something. Every night before going to my bed I go to the master's room to see if he wishes anything, to take any commands for the next day. I went last night after it was late, just before I went to the senator's door. It was blank, senior. I could not have gone to sleep unless I went there."

"Well?" sharply.

"I heard a little sound. It was the scratching of a window shade. I went, closed the window, and locked it tightly. And while looking for the sound I saw the key in its place. It was there at eleven o'clock last night, senior."

"You are sure, Pedro? You are very certain that this key was in the master's room at eleven o'clock?"

"Very certain, senior."

"Then—But it is impossible, Pedro! You say that you locked the windows? All of them?"

"All, senior."

"And the door as you came out?"

"I locked, senior. The key was under my bed. I gave it to you just now. And there is only one key upon the rancho—only one in the world which will unlock it!"

"But then it is impossible!" Stanway, restless, upon his feet, strode back and forth, frowning. If the key had been there last night, if door and windows had been locked, if they had been locked when he went to the room—then how could one of the men who attacked Pedro have had it in his hand at three o'clock in the morning?

"You mean," he said slowly, coming back to the bedside, "that the at-

thousand dollars for a blow, senior! Do you care to strike again?"

Stanway shrugged. "You have overplayed your hand, Torre," he said quietly. "This note from the senator makes me sure of what I was beginning to suspect. Gaucho, come with me."

With no further word, leaving Torre's mystified face looking after him, he went out, Gaucho at his heels. "Gaucho," he said, speaking swiftly from beyond the closed door, "I want you to come to the master's room. Bring some men with you—six, ten—I don't know how many we shall need. Let two of them bring axes. Let all carry side arms. Bring the picked men, Gaucho; the hardest men on the rancho. I think that there is going to be fighting this time."

"The master?" cried Gaucho. "The senator? You know—"

"I know nothing. But I think—that they have never for a second left the house! Hurry, Gaucho!"

And Gaucho hurried, his own face as mystified as Torre's. Stanway went quickly to the bedroom.

"Somewhere in these great thick walls there is a passageway," he whispered to himself. "It runs from this room throughout the house and to the east wing where Teresa's rooms are."

"Somewhere, down below perhaps, there is a room, a dungeon. I think that it is just under the drawing room; I think that that is where De la Guerra is; that many of the things which Torre said were meant to be heard by the old man; that they might taunt and mock him; I think that Torre's men down there heard the crashing glass,

the words which went with it. I think that we are going to find De la Guerra and Teresa there."

He studied the walls. There was nothing to hint at a secret door.

He moved out the bed, found the spot which Teresa's note told of, set his thumb to it, and saw a panel drop down, shelfwise, showing a great iron safe set in the wall. The safe was locked, the key missing. But he knew that he had found De la Guerra's bank. He closed the panel swiftly as Gaucho and his men came to the door.

"Que es, senior?" Gaucho asked quickly. And the black eyes of the dark-faced men thronging behind him—eager, expectant—told as well as words that Gaucho had whispered to his men that the American had a plan, that hope lay behind it.

"Come in, Gaucho. Shut the door. How many men?"

They entered as he spoke. He counted as the last man closed the door behind him.

"Ten, senior. Five more are coming."

"And—sternly—"you can vouch for them, for all of them? You can trust every man to the uttermost, Gaucho?"

"To the uttermost, senior," as sternly. "To the death in the service of the master and"—his voice breaking a little—"the senatorita."

"And the other five?"

"The same."

"Good! This is my plan. Come close, all of you."

He addressed them in Spanish, speaking swiftly, his voice lowered so that the men must crane their necks and lean forward to hear. He told them of his hope that those they sought had never been taken out of the hacienda.

"Now," he ended, "there is no doubt a passageway running from here to the senatorita's rooms. If we find this end of it and attack they may escape at the other end. So we must be ready."

"Gaucho, send two men into the senatorita's rooms. Let them be ready, armed and watchful. Send two more to the stairway. Let Torre and Juarez be bound and watched over by one man only, a man whom you can trust and who will blow their brains out before he lets them escape."

"Let every other man in the house be armed and ready. Then—"

"Then, senior?" eagerly.

"They—with quiet determination—"we shall find where the passage is if we have to tear down the walls. Hurry, Gaucho!"

Gaucho ran upon his errand, calling by name the men he wished to go with him. Stanway, bidding those with him to be very silent, not knowing what means the men he sought might have of overhearing what happened in the room, began a silent search for some sign of a passageway in the thick walls.

And now at last fate and the quick eyes of a vaquero aided him. There was a little scratch on the redwood of the wall just opposite the door through which they had entered, a fresh white scratch. It was Mendoz, a young Mexican, who saw it; it was Mendoz who found a mark of a greasy thumb upon the same panel, some four feet from the floor.

"Aqui, esta!" he muttered. "Senior, look!"

Stanway's heart beat wildly when he saw what Mendoz had found.

"The door of the passageway!" he whispered. "Sh! Be still! Even take off your boots, compañeros. We are going to give them no warning. But first, Mendoz, bring Dempston here, quick! I think he is going to talk now."

Mendez hurried, and presently came back, he and the immense Vidal, walking at Dempston's right and left.

"Dempston," whispered Stanway meeting him, "make no sound. If he cries out—to Vidal and Mendoz—if he makes a sound choke the life out of him. Do you understand Dempston?"

Dempston's pale lips opened, but no words came forth. A little shiver ran

through him.

"We have learned everything, Dempston," Stanway went on in his whispering voice. "Even to the hiding place. There is the door." He pointed to the panel with the thumb-print upon it. "I think that we can send you to the penitentiary for a long time with very little trouble. Will you talk now, Dempston?"

Dempston hesitated, denial upon his lips, growing fear in his eyes.

"What do you want to know?" he asked in a shaking whisper. "—Oh my God! This has gone further already—"

"I want to know how many men are with Torre in this thing?"

"There—there is Juarez—and—another—"

"Don't be a fool as well as a coward, Dempston!" muttered Stanway. "You are such a petty little thief that nobody is going to want to prosecute you if you help us now. There I Torre and Juarez and you. Where else?"

"I—I don't know," Dempston licked his dry lips and swayed between Vidal and Mendoz as though he were going to fall. "Oh, I was a fool—"

"Granted. But tell what you know while you have the chance. How many?"

"Seven, I think," chattered Dempston. "Seven besides Torre and Juarez; Five inside, two outside with the horses."

"Outside?" queried Stanway.

"Yes. To ride away, leading extra horses, so that it would sound like a number of riders were racing for the border. To leave the trail which you followed south. The other five to do the work inside."

"And De la Guerra was never to be taken from the house?"

"No. It seemed safer this way."

"There was every hazard in it—"

"Simply because you happened to be at the rancho," returned Dempston with a little flash of bitterness. "Had there been only the senatorita, it would have been easy to have worked on her love for her grandfather."

"And Torre?"

"Killed a man a month ago in San Antonio—is running away from the gallows. With the money he expected to make from this he could buy the silence of the one man who can identify him as the murderer. It was his only chance."

"Juarez?"

"Is actually a rebel captain. Torre was to give him his share. Then Torre was to have a commission in the rebel army. He looked to distinguished favors when the rebels fought their way into power. Now—"

"Now what?"

"Now, if he goes into Mexico the rebels will shoot him as a traitor. That was another chance he was taking. He was to give five thousand dollars to the cause. For that they let him have Juarez and the other men. He was to give his life if he led to them. If he tricked them or—if he failed, He could never get across the border without their spies finding him."

Then Gaucho returned with word that everything was ready. Vidal, at



He Turned a Corner.

Stanway's command, bound Dempston securely once more, hand and foot, and tossed him to the bed as one might toss a sack of wheat. The men had kicked off their shoes and boots, and stood eager and expectant.

Stanway, his revolver in his right hand, pressed with the left thumb upon the spot in the paneling where another thumb had pressed.

There was a little click, and the panel slid back into the wall, showing a narrow doorway, a narrow passageway beyond. There were candles burning there, their steady flames casting a clear, yellow light.

"Each man keep three feet behind the man in front of him," whispered Stanway. "We must have room, Vidal, Gaucho, come just behind me."

He stepped through the door into the two-foot wide hallway which ran along inside the wall, its trend eastward and downward. There were no steps, but the slant led quickly under the foundations of the great adobe building.

Dempston's pale lips opened, but no words came forth. A little shiver ran

(Continued in Next Issue.)

BIG GUN NOT WORTH WHILE

American Ordnance Experts Could Outdo the Hun in Savagery, but Are Not Likely To.

The Hun 75-mile gun with which Paris was harassed is doubtless still regarded by many as evidence of the much-advertised German mechanical ingenuity.

Ordnance experts have long been aware of the possibility of such a gun. But they have also been aware of its impracticability owing to a lack of means of controlling its fire effectively in such dastardly work as shelling a great city regardless of whom or what was hit.

As an object lesson our ordnance department has designed, without actually building, a supergun which dwarfs the German machine into insignificance. The data, recently made public through the Scientific American, fairly bewitches the lay mind.

The barrel of the gun is 225 feet long and weighs 325 tons. The pressure developed is 45,000 pounds to the square inch. The projectile has a muzzle velocity of 8,500 foot-seconds, and develops the terrific energy of 800,000 foot-tons. Its range is 121 miles, approximately the distance between Chicago and Madison, Wis. Its time of flight is four minutes, and it soars heavenward to a height of 46 miles.

This is awesome; but the cold-blooded expert points out that, after all, the gun delivers only a 400-pound shell, containing 60 pounds of high explosive, and that such a gun would cost \$2,500,000. A bombing plane costing \$30,000 would drop a 1,600-pound bomb with greater accuracy of aim.

The German supergun demonstrates the savagery of the Hun—the Berserker madness that strikes regardless of whom it strikes. But it also demonstrates an intellectual weakness—the love of mechanism for mechanism's sake. A complicated or difficult piece of machinery captivates his admiration because it is complicated or difficult, regardless of its practicability.

With American genius, simplicity is the desideratum. The mechanism, for instance, of the Browning automatic, whether pistol, rifle or machine gun, is astonishingly simple and practically demountable by the fingers alone. One looks at it and wonders why it wasn't invented half a century since. And right there one pays genius a high tribute.

Kei Hara.

For the first time in the history of Japan a man without a title is at the head of the government. Mr. Kei Hara, the present premier, is a commoner, born in northern Japan, and educated in Tokyo on a scholarship founded by the feudal lord of his clan. He studied law as a profession, but entered journalism, serving on the immediate journalistic ancestor of the now well-known Hochi Shimbun. From journalism he entered diplomacy under Marquess Inouye, then foreign minister, and was sent as consul to France. Returning to Japan he became director of the commercial bureau of the foreign office under Count Mutsu; and then in turn minister in Korea, and vice minister of foreign affairs in Japan, retiring temporarily to private life when Count Mutsu gave up the political work that had earned him the reputation of being the greatest modern Japanese diplomatist. Mr. Hara returned to national politics in 1900 as minister of communications in the new cabinet of Prince Ito, and from that appointment his rise has been steady till he was

intely made premier, and so became the first commoner that has ever in Japan occupied so high a position.

How It Began.

Customary figure as the boy scout has become in the United States, General Baden-Powell's visit added much to American knowledge of the movement. A good many newspaper readers were probably surprised to learn that it owes its beginning to the Boer war and the siege of Mafeking, without which it may be questioned whether there would be any boy scouts. In command at Mafeking, General Baden-Powell looked far beyond the siege and saw that a great and useful organization of boys might be developed from the corps of boy messengers organized to serve the forces holding that hard-pressed town. That was the beginning of it, but the same force of character that defended Mafeking carried forward the boy scout idea until it was generally recognized as a project for character building rather than encouraging militarism in the young. Another bit of information that probably surprised many Americans was that Baden-Powell is descended on his mother's side from Capt. John Smith.

Beavers Copy Tepees of Indians. In the pond were a number of beaver houses which looked like small Indian tepees, writes Samuel Scoville, Jr., in Boys' Life. Most of them were built in water several feet deep and were from three to four feet above the surface and about five feet in diameter. One, however, was a huge one, built in deep water, and fully twice as large as any other. It was made mostly of peeled cottonwood poles and stood on a firm foundation of mud and sticks built up from the bottom. The poles leaned together from the top and had been woven in and out with thick brush and plastered with mud and turf until the walls were three feet thick.

Proving an Alibi.

"Whut Lawya Attukses say 'bout tem chickens you stole?"

"He say Alim Bible to go to jail ess'n Ah git somebody to prove a lie by."—Cartoons Magazine.

WORN NERVES.

Nervous troubles, with backache, dizzy spells, queer pains and irregular kidneys, give reason to suspect kidney weakness and to try the remedy that has helped your neighbors. Mrs. T. J. Hunter, Elm St., Lancaster, says: "I can certainly recommend Doan's Kidney Pills, for they have done me a wonderful lot of good. About three years ago, I was taken with a sharp pain in the small of my back and I could hardly straighten up. The pains were simply terrible. My nerves were all unstrung and I thought I would go wild. Dizzy spells bothered me, too, and I felt tired out most of the time. My kidneys gave me a lot of trouble, also. Some friends recommended Doan's Kidney Pills and I began using them. It only took Doan's a short time to give me splendid relief and after I had finished one box, I was entirely cured."

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