



# 54-40 OR FIGHT

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### SYNOPSIS.

John Calhoun becomes secretary of state in Tyler's cabinet with the fixed determination to acquire both Texas and Oregon. Nicholas Trist, his secretary, is sent with a message to the Baroness von Ritz, spy and reputed mistress of the British minister, Pakenham. Trist encounters the baroness and assists her in escaping from pursuers. She agrees to see Calhoun, and as a pledge that she will tell him what she wants to know regarding the intentions of England toward Mexico, she gives Trist a slipper, the mate of which has been lost. Trist is ordered to Montreal on state business, and arranges to be married to Elizabeth Churchill before departing. The baroness says she will try to prevent the marriage. A drunken congressman, who is assisting Trist in his wedding arrangements, blunderingly sends the "baroness" slipper to Elizabeth instead of the owner, and the marriage is declared off. Nicholas finds the baroness in Montreal, she having succeeded where he failed, in discovering England's intentions regarding Oregon. She tells him the slipper he had contained a note from the Texas attaché, Pakenham, saying that if the United States did not annex Texas within 30 days she would lose both Texas and Oregon. Calhoun orders Trist to head a party bound for Oregon. Calhoun excites the jealousy of Senora Yturrio, and thereby secures the signature of the Texas attaché to a treaty of annexation. Nicholas arrives in Oregon. Later the baroness arrives on a British warship. She tells Nicholas that a note she placed in her slipper caused the breaking off of his marriage, and that she intends to return to Washington to repair the wrong. Nicholas follows her. He learns on the way that Polk has been elected and Texas annexed, and that there is to be war with Mexico. The baroness tells Trist that in return for a compromise of the Oregon boundary on the forty-ninth degree, she has sold herself to Pakenham. She tells him the story of her life. Trist breaks Pakenham's key to the baroness' apartments. Pakenham calls for his price, and the baroness refuses to pay. He insults her. She compels him to apologize, holds him up in the true light, and he declares that she is pure as a lily. The treaty is signed by Pakenham. The baroness gives the treaty to Calhoun and tells him she got it for Nicholas.

### CHAPTER XXXV.—Continued.

Mr. Calhoun is commonly credited with having brought about this treaty, and with having been author of its terms. So he was, but only in the singular way which in these foregoing pages I have related. States have their price. Texas was bought by blood. Oregon—ah, we who own it ought to prize it. None of our country is half so full of romance, none of it is half so clean, as our great and bodiful far northwest, still young in its days of destiny.

"We should in time have had all of Oregon, perhaps," said Mr. Calhoun; "at least, that is the talk of these fierce politicians."

"But for this fresh outbreak on the southwest there would have been a better chance," said Helena von Ritz; "but I think, as matters are to-day, you would be wise to accept this compromise. I have seen your men marching, thousands of them, the grandest sight of this century or any other. They give full base for this compromise. Given another year, and your rifles and your plows would make your claims still better. But this is to-day—"

"Believe me, Mr. Calhoun, I broke in, 'your signature must go on this.'"

"How now? Why so anxious, my son?"

"Because it is right!"

Calhoun turned to Helena von Ritz. "Has this been presented to Mr. Buchanan, our secretary of state?" he asked.

"Certainly not. It has been shown to no one. I have been here in Washington working—well, working in secret to secure this document for you. I do this—well, I will be frank with you—I do this for Mr. Trist. He is my friend. I wish to say to you that he has been—a faithful—"

I saw her face whiten and her lips shut tight. She swayed a little as she stood. Dr. Ward was at her side and assisted her to a couch. For the first time the splendid courage of Helena von Ritz seemed to fall her. She sank back, white, unconscious.

"It's these damned stays, John!" began Dr. Ward fiercely. "She has fainted. Here, put her down, so. We'll bring her around in a minute. Great Jove! I want her to hear us thank her. It's splendid work she has done for us. But why?"

When, presently, under the ministrations of the old physician, Helena von Ritz recovered her consciousness, she arose, fighting desperately to pull herself together and get back her splendid courage.

"Would you retire now, madam?" asked Mr. Calhoun. "I have sent for my daughter."

"No, no. It is nothing!" she said. "Forgive me, it is only an old habit of mine. See, I am quite well!"

Indeed, in a few moments she had regained something of that magnificent energy which was her heritage. As though nothing had happened, she arose and walked swiftly across the room. Her eyes were fixed upon the great map which hung upon the walls—a strange map it would seem to us to-day. Across this she swept a white hand.

"I saw your men cross this," she said, pointing along the course of the great Oregon Trail—whose detailed path was then unknown to our geographers. "I saw them go west along that road of destiny. I told myself that by virtue of their courage they had won this war. Sometime there will come the great war between your peo-



"I Am But a Woman," She Said, "But It Chances That I Have Been Able to Do This Country Perhaps Something of a Favor."

ple and those who rule them. The people still will win."

She spread out her two hands top and bottom of the map. "All, all, ought to be yours—from the Isthmus to the ice, for the sake of the people of the world. The people—but in time they will have their own!"

We listened to her silently, crediting her enthusiasm to her sex, her race; but what she said has remained in one mind at least from that day to this. Well might part of her speech remain in the minds to-day of people and rulers alike. Are we worth the price paid for the country we gained? And when we shall be worth that price, what numerals shall mark our territorial lines?

"May I carry this document to Mr. Pakenham?" asked John Calhoun, at last, touching the paper on the table.

"Please, no. Do not. Only be sure that this proposition of compromise will meet with his acceptance."

"I do not quite understand why you do not go to Mr. Buchanan, our secretary of state."

"Because I pay my debts," she said simply. "I told you that Mr. Trist and I were comrades. I conceived it might be some credit for him in his work to have been the means of doing this much."

"He shall have that credit, madam, be sure of that," said John Calhoun. He held out to her his long, thin, bloodless hand.

"Madam," he said, "I have been mistaken in many things. My life will be written down as failure. I have been unjudged. But at least it shall not be said of me that I failed to reverence a woman such as you. All that I thought of you, that first night I met you, was more than true. And did I not tell you you would one day, one way, find your reward?"

He did not know what he said; but I knew, and I spoke with him in the silence of my own heart, knowing that his speech would be the same were his knowledge even with mine.

"To-morrow," went on Calhoun, "to-morrow evening there is to be what we call a ball of our diplomacy at the White House. Our administration, knowing that war is soon to be announced in the country, seeks to make a little festival here at the capital. We whistle to keep up our courage. We listen to music to make us forget our consciences. To-morrow night we dance. All Washington will be there. Baroness von Ritz, a card will come to you."

She swept him a curtsy, and gave him a smile.

"Now, as for me," he continued, "I am an old man, and long ago danced my last dance in public. To-morrow night all of us will be at the White House—Mr. Trist will be there, and Dr. Ward, and a certain lady, a Miss Elizabeth Churchill, madam, whom I shall be glad to have you meet. You must not fail us, dear lady, because I am going to ask of you one favor."

He bowed with a courtesy which might have come from generations of an old aristocracy. "If you please, madam, I ask you to honor me with your hand for my first dance in years—my last dance in all my life."

one younger man, took her hands and kissed them.

Now our flag floats on the Columbia and on the Rio Grande. I am older now, but when I think of that scene, I wish that flag might float yet freer; and though the price were war itself, that it might float over a cleaner and a nobler people, over cleaner and nobler rulers, more sensible of the splendor of that heritage of principle which should be ours.

### CHAPTER XXXVI.

#### The Palo Alto Ball.

A beautiful woman pleases the eye, a good woman pleases the heart; one is a jewel, the other a treasure.—Napoleon I.

On the evening of that following day in May, the sun hung red and round over a distant unknown land along the Rio Grande. In that country, no iron trails as yet had come. The magic of the wire, so recently applied to the service of man, was as yet there unknown. Word traveled slowly by horses and mules and carts. There came small news from that far-off country, half tropic, covered with palms and crooked dwarfed growth of mesquite and chaparral. The long-horned cattle lived in these dense thickets, the spotted jaguar, the wolf, the ocelot, the javalina, many smaller creatures not known in our northern lands. In the loam along the stream the deer left their tracks, mingled with those of the wild turkeys and of countless water fowl. It was a far-off, unknown, unvalued land. Our flag, long past the Sabine, had halted at the Nueces. Now it was to advance across this wild region to the Rio Grande. This did smug James Polk keep his premises!

Among these tangled mesquite thickets ran sometimes long bayous, made from the overflow of the greater rivers—resacas, as the natives call them. Tall palms sometimes grow along the bayous, for the country is half tropic. Again, on the dryer ridges, there might be taller detached trees, heavier forests—palo alto, the natives call them. In some such place as this, where the trees were tall, there was fired the first gun of our war in the southwest. There were strange noises heard here in the wilderness, followed by lesser noises, and by human groans. Some faces that night were upturned to the moon—the same moon which swam so gloriously over Washington. Taylor camped closer to the Rio Grande. The fight was next to begin by the lagoon called the Resaca de la Palma. But that night at the capital that same moon told us nothing of all this. We did not hear the guns. It was far from Palo Alto to our ports of Galveston or New Orleans. Our cockaded army made its own history in its own unreported way.

We at the White House ball that night also made history in our own unreported way. As our army was adding to our confines on the southwest, so there were other, though secret, forces which added to our territory in the far northwest. As to this and as to the means by which it came about, I have already been somewhat plain.

It was a goodly company that assembled for the grand ball, the first one in the second season of Mr. Polk's somewhat confused and discordant administration. Social matters had started off dour enough. Mrs. Polk was herself of strict religious practice, and I imagine it had taken somewhat of finesse to get her consent to these festivities. It was called sometimes the diplomat's ball. At least there was diplomacy back of it. It was mere accident which set this celebration upon the very evening of the battle of Palo Alto, May 8, 1846.

By ten o'clock there were many in the great room which had been made ready for the dancing, and rather a brave company it might have been called. We had at least the splendor of the foreign diplomats' uniforms for our background, and to this we added the bravest of our attire, each one in his own individual fashion, I fear. Thus my friend Jack Dandridge was wholly resplendent in a new waistcoat of his own devising, and an evening coat which almost swept the floor as he executed the evolutions of his western style of dancing. Other gentlemen were, perhaps, more grave and staid. We had with us at least one man, old in government service, who dared the silk stockings and knee breeches of an earlier generation. Yet another wore the white powdered queue, which might have been more suited for his grandfather. The younger men of the day wore their hair long, in fashion quite different, yet this did not detract from the distinction of some of the faces which one might have seen among them—some of them to sleep all too soon upturned to the moon in another and yet more bitter war, aftermath of this with Mexico. The tall stock was still in evidence at that time, and the ruffled shirts gave something of a formal and old-fashioned touch to the assembly. Such as they were, in their somewhat varied but not uninteresting attire, the best of Washington were present. Invitation was wholly by card. Some said that Mrs. Polk wrote these invitations in her own hand, though this we may be permitted to doubt.

Whatever might have been said as to the democratic appearance of our gentlemen in Washington, our women were always our great reliance, and these at least never failed to meet the approval of the most sneering of our foreign visitors. Thus we had present that night, as I remember, two young girls both later to become famous in Washington society; tall and slender young Terese Chalfant, later to become Mrs. Pugh of Ohio, and to receive at the hands of Denmark's minister, who knelt before her at a later public ball, that jeweled clasp which his wife had bade him present to the most beautiful woman he found in America. Here also was Miss Harriet Williams of Georgetown, later to become the second wife of that Baron Bodisco of Russia who had represented his government with us since the year 1838—a tall, robust, blonde lady she later grew to be. Brown's hotel, home of many of our statesmen and their ladies, turned out a full complement. Mr. Clay was there, smiling, though I fear none too happy. Mr. Edward Everett, as it chanced, was with us at that time. We had Sam Houston of Texas, who would not, until he appeared upon the floor, relinquish the striped blanket which distinguished him—though a splendid figure of a man he appeared when he paced forth in evening dress, a part of which was a waistcoat embroidered in such fancy as might have delighted the eye of his erstwhile Indian wife had she been there to see it. Here and there, scattered about the floor, there might have been seen many of the public figures of America at that time, men from north and south and east and west, and from many other nations beside our own.

Under Mrs. Polk's social administration, we did not waltz, but our ball began with a stately march, really a grand procession, in its way distinctly interesting, in scarlet and gold and blue and silks, and all the flowered circumstance of brocades and laces of our ladies. And after our march we had our own polite Virginia reel, merry as any dance, yet stately too.

I was late in arriving that night, for it must be remembered that this was but my second day in town, and I had had small chance to take my chief's advice, and to make myself presentable for an occasion such as this. I was fresh from my tailor, and very new-made when I entered the room. I came just in time to see what I was glad to see; that is to say, the keeping of John Calhoun's promise to Helena von Ritz.

It was not to be denied that there had been talk regarding this lady, and that Calhoun knew it, though not from me. Much of it was idle talk, based largely upon her mysterious life. Beyond that, a woman beautiful as she has many enemies among her sex. There were dark glances for her that night, I do not deny, before Mr. Calhoun changed them. For, however John Calhoun was rated by his enemies, the worst of these knew well his austerely spotless private life, and his scrupulous concern for decorum.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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### THEN HE WENT.



Mr. Bore (looking)—Gracious! It's nearly ten o'clock.  
Miss Caustique (suppressing a yawn)—Are you quite sure it's not eleven?

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"She is always doing something original."

"Yes, but her latest stunt, if it becomes a fad, will upset society."

"Why, what is it?"  
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"Yes, but how consolingly homely!"  
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