

Second Time West

by
T. C. BRIDGES

Principal Characters

SIR JAMES CHERNOCKE, BARONET, formerly Jim Weston, a cowboy. He has inherited his uncle's titles and estates. Later in the story is known as Grant Adams.

BILL BEVERLEY, his friend and secretary.

NITA VAUGHAN, Jim's fiancée.
JOAN CHANDLER, whose brother Bart was Jim's partner on the ranch at Loomis, New Mexico. She had saved Jim's life when he rescued Bart in a shooting affray. There is still a warrant out against Jim for murder, in Loomis.

VINCENT BIGNAL, Joan's stepfather, and friend of

MURRAY FARNE, who wants to marry Joan and get possession of her ranch. Farne is head of terrorizing gang, who, assisted by the Sheriff, **GRANT GARRETT,** are seeking to gain possession of all the land surrounding Loomis.

WARD HASKELL and **DAVE CONDON,** two of the ranchers who are oppressed by Farne's gang.

Synopsis of Previous Chapters

SIR JAMES CHERNOCKE has inherited the baronetcy and a fortune from his uncle. He is engaged to **NITA VAUGHAN.**

Before this event he had been plain Jim Preston, working on a ranch in America, where he had been mixed up in a shooting affray. His partner, **Bart Chandler,** had been arrested on a framed-up charge. In rescuing him, Jim had shot a man named **Wesley Garnett.** Hunted, he escaped through the pluck and cleverness of **Bart's** sixteen-year-old sister, **JOAN.** Later, he heard from Joan that Bart had been killed in an accident. He wrote at once but got no reply.

One day, while Sir James is fishing in his own part of the stream, he hooked a fish which led him out of his bounds. He followed the fish, as was customary, and just as he had landed it, he found himself challenged by a girl. She turns out to be **Joan Chandler.** She tells him that her American stepfather, **VINCENT BIGNAL,** has taken charge of her and is trying to make her marry his friend, **MURRAY FARNE,** whom she loathes.

Just then Farne arrives, a huge, cruel-looking man. The two men quar-

rel, Farne accusing Chernocke of trespass. In a struggle, they both fall in the river. On returning home, Jim tells his friends and secretary, **BILL BEVERLEY,** of the happening. The following day, he visits the cottage that Bignal had rented, but finds that the three have gone.

Time passed and there was no sign of Joan or of anybody else. The house was very quiet. Jim at last lost patience, got up and went to the door. The handle turned but the door would not open. He tried again, vainly using all his strength, before he realized that the door was locked and that he was a prisoner.

For a moment Jim was so angry he could not think clearly. To be tricked like this—locked in by a woman! But if he had a hot temper he had also plenty of self-control and in a few moments was himself again. He turned to the window. It was high up, small, and now Jim saw—that he had noticed before—that it was barred. Even if he smashed the glass that was no good, for a big, old yew grew in front of it completely blocking the view. No one could possibly see from the street any signal he might make. He was properly imprisoned and—what made it more bitter—it was his own fault. He had walked into the trap like any young and innocent mouse.

There was still the door, there were also chairs and Jim could supply more muscle power than most men. He picked up the heavier of the two chairs and swung it with all his force against the right hand top panel. The chair broke to bits but the door seemed little the worse.

"That won't do you no good," came a voice from outside. Farne's, of course. "It ain't the first time this room's been used as a jail, and that door is covered with sheet iron. Take dynamite to shift it, and that's one thing you haven't got. You haven't got much else either, come to think of it. No food, nothing to drink, one chair left to sit on and no bed to lie on."

Farne laughed and the laugh was so full of gloating malice it sent a chill through Jim. The man went on: "Nothing to say," he jeered. "Feeling a bit sore, ain't you? You didn't believe me when I told you no one ever hit Murray Farne without being sorry for it."

"And I'll hit you again if you come inside," Jim retorted. "Only of course you won't, you yellow dog."
"I'd come in and break your neck for you if I had the time," said Farne savagely, "but Joan's waiting for me, and when you next see her, if you ever do, she'll be Mrs. Murray Farne."
"She won't," Jim told him. "She has

just about as much use for you as I have, you dirty crook." He heard Farne breathe heavily and hoped against hope that he would open the door. But the American was too clever for that.

"Trying to bait me," he sneered, "but it won't work, mister. I've got you where I want you and there I'll keep you. The pretty part is the way you walked into the trap. You thought I didn't see you on the tram. Why, you fool, I had a man watching for you at Euston. He phoned me and I was waiting for you outside that agent's office. And you followed like a lamb." He laughed again and Jim pricked all over with impotent fury. Once more Farne spoke.

"The woman who let you in has gone. When I leave there won't be no one in the house. You may yell your head off. Sir James Chernocke, but I doubt anyone will hear you. Now I'm going and you can sit there and think of me sharing a cabin with Joan on the way home."

Farne's last taunt was not so effective as Farne no doubt expected it would be, for Jim very well knew that Joan would sooner throw herself overboard than share a room with Farne. Yet as Jim heard the front door close with a bang he felt as sick and savage as a man could feel. "The pretty part is the way you walked into the trap," Farne had sneered, and this was true for at the moment when he had spotted Farne in the tram, he had never had the faintest suspicion that the whole thing was planned. It was bitter to feel that a fool he had been and the consequences of his foolishness threatened to be serious, though, to do Jim justice, it was of Joan he was thinking—not himself.

But Jim Chernocke was not the sort to sit still and moan over his misfortunes. Farne was hardly out of the house before Jim was hunting for a way out of his prison. The door was hopeless, for if, as Farne had said, it was covered with sheet iron, it was no use trying to cut through a panel. He turned to the window, and as it would not open, smashed the glass with leg of the broken chair, and tried the bars. There were three of these cemented firmly into the sill, and no rust about them, either. He tried the cement with the point of his knife, but it was hard as iron. The only other way of escape was the fireplace, but a very brief inspection proved that the chimney was far too narrow for anything larger than a small monkey.

Still, Jim did not give up. There might be a cellar under the room. He pulled up the druggery and set to work on the floor. The boards were thick and solid, and he could not get his knife blade between them.

By this time he was getting hot and bothered. He sat down on the one remaining chair, and began to consider the chances of outside help. They were not rosy. Somewhere about lunch-time Bissett would phone the Cosmopolis, and finding him out, would probably start inquiries. In the long run he might possibly get hold of the taxi-driver, but even if he did so, and found where Jim was imprisoned, it would be many hours before there was any hope of release, and by that time Farne, Bignal and Joan would be well on their way to America.

"Of all the darn fools, I'm surely the worst!" Jim groaned, and in despair he pushed the chair to the window, got on it, and shouted through the bars.
"That you, sir?" The reply was so unexpected that Jim nearly fell off his chair, but he recovered quickly and called loudly in reply. With intense relief he saw his sturdy taxi-man pushing his way beneath the thick branches of the big yew.
"What's up, sir? You hurt?" the man inquired.
"Not hurt. I'm locked in."
"Huh, I thought summat was wrong," replied the other. "First I see that big blighter come back, and I knowed you wasn't wanting him. Then I see a woman come out carrying a bag, and after that the big chap himself, in the devil's own hurry. When you didn't show up I reckoned it were time to get around."

"Thank God, you did!" said Jim. "See here—by the way, what's your name?"
"Trant, sir—Noah Trant."
"Listen, Trant! You've got to get me out quickly, and I don't want the police in this. Every minute counts."
"Perlice! Who wants perlice? I'll have yer out in two ticks!" He was tuning when Jim stopped him.
"It's no use trying the door. The front door is locked, and the door of this room is sheet iron. The window is the only way, and I don't know how you'll make it. The bars are solid and set in cement."

"Don't you worry," replied Trant reassuringly. "I'll have them bars out all right. Just wait a jiffy till I get something to shift 'em." He was off, and for a heavy man it was wonderful how quickly he moved. Jim had hardly time to wonder what Trant would do when he was back carrying an old packing-case and a heavy crowbar. "Bit o' luck!" he remarked. "Found this here bar in the out-house. Saved me going back to the garridge." He climbed on the case, and, inserting the crowbar between one of the window-bars and the wall, put his weight on it. The window far bent, he took a fresh grip, tried again, and, with a sharp crack, the bar broke away from its fastenings, and fell with a clatter.

"Can you make it, sir?" Trant asked, but the question was hardly out of his mouth before Jim was half-way out. Trant gave him a hand, and Jim jumped safely to the ground.

"Not next?" Trant asked.
"Nearest telephone," Jim said briefly, and in a very few minutes was in a kiosk, ringing up **Martin Bissett.**

"He is out, Sir James?" was the answer in a feminine voice.
"Out!" Jim repeated. "When will he be in?"
"I can't say. It may be an hour. He didn't tell me when he'd be back." Jim swore under his breath. Every minute counted. Trant had said that Farne was in the devil of a hurry. For all Jim knew he and Joan and Bignal might already be on their way to a port.

SECOND TIME WEST
Telling Bill and Nita of his plans, he fellows Farne and the two women to London. After consulting a private enquiry agent, **MARTIN BISSETT,** he sees Farne on a tram and follows him in a taxi to a house in St. John's Wood.

The taxi-driver keeps watch, and when Farne goes out, Chernocke calls at the house and asks for Miss Chandler. He is shown into a room, and finds the door locked on him. Farne outside tells him he has walked into a trap and that he is sailing in a few hours' time, with Joan as his wife.

Escape seems impossible for Chernocke, as the door is lined with iron and the window barred. Jim tries shouting, and is rescued by the taxi-driver, **NOAH TRANT,** who had been keeping a watch. He telephones Bissett, but is told that the enquiry agent is out.

(Now Read On)

CHAPTER VI. THUNDER ROARS

Jim spoke again through the phone. "I'll come to the office and wait for Mr. Bissett. It's urgent. If he comes in before I arrive ask him to wait for me." He hung up, hurried back to the waiting taxi and gave Trant the address in John Street. Arrived at Bissett's office, he told him to wait.
"I may be some time," he added.
"That don't matter, sir," Trant answered, and by his tone was evidently enjoying the excitement.

Bissett was not in and there was no word of him so Jim sat down to wait. It seemed an hour, but was actually only twenty minutes before the door opened and the enquiry agent came in. Jim did not waste an instant in telling what had happened, and **Martin Bissett's** eyes widened a little as he listened.

"It was the Mermaid Line Office Farne visited," Jim ended.
"That was probably a blind," said Bissett. "I don't know yet what line Farne has booked by, but I am hoping to hear at any minute. The odds are that, if he is leaving to-day, he is going by the Rurritania from Southampton. There is no fast boat before the Berlin on Friday." He paused and looked at Jim. "But you have him all ends up, Sir James," he went on. "Shutting you up like that is a pretty serious offence. If I'd been you I should have gone straight to the near-

est police station." Jim got rather red. "And a pretty fool I should have looked, Mr. Bissett." A shadow of a smile showed on the other's solemn face. "That's true," he began and just then the telephone bell rang. Bissett listened a moment.

"All right, Wharton," he said and replaced the receiver. "It is the Rurritania," he told him. "And if you want to catch the boat train you'll have to hurry. It leaves Waterloo at eleven-thirty." Jim glanced at the clock. It was just on the quarter past. He sprang up and grabbed his hat.

"I have a taxi. We may just make it."
"I'll come with you," said Bissett. "I don't want you getting into more trouble." He, too, seized his hat and reached the street as quickly as Jim.

"Waterloo," said Jim to Trant. "Can you do it in a quarter of an hour?"
"It ain't possible—not with the traffic there is now. Best thing is to take you to Tottenham Court Road Station. You can do it by Tube in ten minutes."
"All right," Jim answered. Go ahead."

At the station Jim waited just long enough to tell Trant to come to Waterloo and, if they had left, to call later at Bissett's office. Then he and Bissett rattled down the steps. Luck was against them, as they reached the platform, a train went out. They had to wait three minutes for the next and, when they reached Waterloo, the boat-train had just left. Jim did not waste time in groaning.

"We must have a special," he declared.
"Not at this hour. There's too much traffic. Ask if you like, but I'm sure."

"Then a plane," said Jim. "We'll ring up Croydon." He hurried off and rang up Croydon Aerodrome. After a little delay he was told that he could have a taxi-plane, but that the weather report spoke of thunder-storms along the South Coast, and he was warned that a plane might be delayed.

"Better try a car," Bissett said when Jim told him. "The ship doesn't sail till two. It's only seventy-five miles by road and with any luck we may do it." Jim merely nodded and ran out. Just as they got outside Trant drove up.

"We want a fast car in a hurry," Jim told him.
"Jump in," was all Trant said and whirled them off to a garage in Waterloo Road.

"Got the Superspeed, Joe?" he asked of the proprietor.
"She's in. You wanting her?"

"And quick," said Trant briefly. He turned to Jim. "Southampton, ain't it?"
"That's it. Think we can do it by two?"

"If you let me drive."
"I've handled a racing car, myself," said Jim.

"But not in traffic, sir. And I know the road."
"All right," Jim answered.

The Superspeed was not new, but she was in good order, and Trant certainly knew how to handle her. The way in which he slipped through the traffic stirred Bissett's admiration.

"Something out of the usual for a taxi driver," he remarked to Jim. "Where did you find him?"
"Quite by chance."

"You were lucky," said Bissett briefly and Jim agreed. But it was not yet that he knew quite how lucky he had been in picking up Noah Trant.

Clear of London Trant put his foot down and the needle began to touch sixty, but it was not until they were past Woking that he really let her out. Jim had never driven or been driven at eighty on the open road, but he was going it now and quite happy about it for Trant's control of the big car was perfect, and he seemed to know the road as well as he knew Piccadilly.

The morning had been fine but very hot, and now ominous clouds in the south-west reminded Jim of the Croydon warning.

"Good job we didn't try flying," he said to Bissett. Bissett nodded.

"Yes, that's a bad storm," he said briefly, and as he spoke a crooked streak of fire split the piled up purple, and a little later came the air-snaking rumble of the first peal. Jim hoped against hope that they might escape it, but soon he could see a grey wall ahead while the rumble turned to an almost continuous roar.

Ten miles on the London side of Winchester they hit it. Jim had seen electric storms in New Mexico but never one to beat this. It wasn't rain but hail and the rattle of it on the road and the roof of the car drowned the



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thunder. It grew almost dark but a darkness lit by long lines of darting fire of blinding intensity.

Trant switched on the headlights but the only result was to turn the hail into a white wall through which it was impossible to see. He spoke to Jim.

"No use, sir. I'll have to slack up."
"Better stop," Jim said. "It can't last."

"I'll shift on a few yards. Don't like these trees," Trant answered, and the words were not out of his mouth before there was a white-hot blaze, a report like a shell bursting overhead followed by a rending crash. Trant stepped on the brake and stopped the car just as a great fir topped across the road in front of them, so close that one of the smaller branches actually struck the bonnet.

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like." Jim cheered up.
"We'll cable money, but we had better not have her met at the pier. Farne would know that it was my doing."
"Very well. You can explain it all to Miss Chandler in your cable," Jim frowned.

"Suppose Farne get hold of the message."
"That's quite simple. Warn the operator to be sure the message is put into Miss Chandler's hands when she is alone."

"There are a lot of things you know and I don't," Jim said ruefully.
"And quite a few other way on," (Continued on Page Three)

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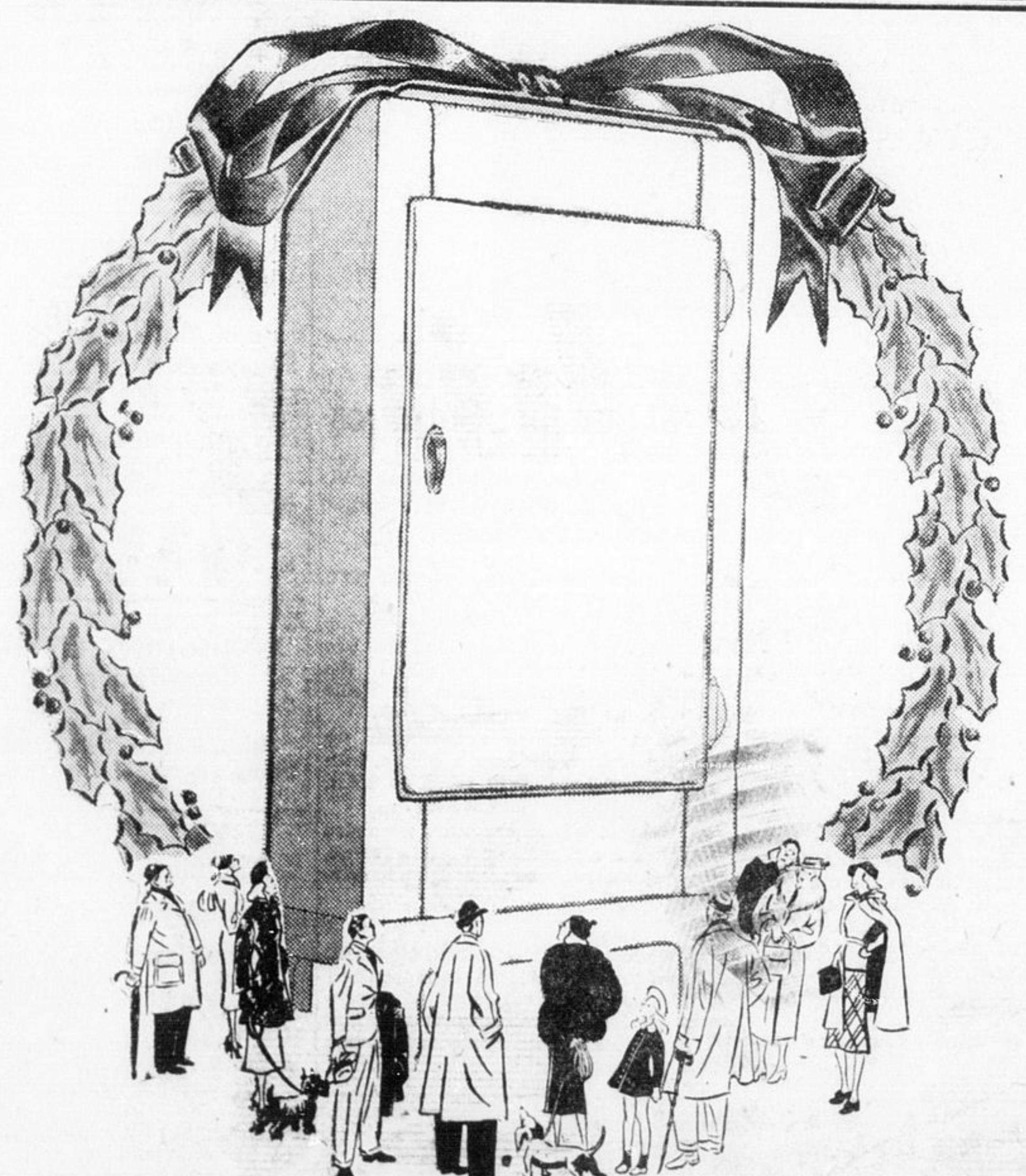
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