

## *The Miracle of Montgomery*

**M**artin needed that new strength very soon. Three nights later, while he was at a meeting, he received some terrible news. His house had been bombed. The whole front had been blown away. Martin raced home, thinking of only one thing. Coretta! Yoki! Were they all right?

Luckily they were. Coretta had been in the living room when she heard a thud on the front porch. She thought someone had thrown a brick—it had happened before. But she decided to go to the back of the

house anyway. When the bomb exploded she was safe.

Now Martin hugged her hard. Then he felt a hand on his arm. It was one of his aides. "Doc, you've got to come out and talk to them," the man said. "They're getting out of hand."

A large crowd of Negroes had gathered outside. They were angry about the bombing. They were ready to go after any white people in sight. As Martin held up his hands to get their attention he heard one man shout at a white policeman, "I've got my gun and you've got yours. So let's shoot it out!"

Quickly Martin began to speak. "My wife and baby are all right. So don't panic. Don't do anything panicky at all. Don't get your weapons.

"We are not advocating violence," Martin continued. "I want you to love your enemies. Love them and let them know you love them. I want it to be known the length and breadth of the land that if

I am stopped, the movement will not stop. If I am stopped our work will not stop, for what we are doing is right.

"Remember the words of Jesus, 'He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.' We must meet our white brothers' hate with love."

The crowd stared at him. How could a man whose house had just been bombed—a man whose wife and child had barely escaped being killed—how could he say such things?

At last one old man broke the silence. "God bless you, son," he said. "Amen to that," others added, as they began to drift away.

*I want it to be known the length and breadth of the land*, he had said. And it was. More and more reporters had been coming to Montgomery in the last few weeks. Now the story of this young black preacher who stood in front of his bombed house and talked about love and nonviolence became news all over the country.



But still the city of Montgomery refused to give in. Next they took Martin to court. They said the movement was breaking an old antiboycott law. It was interfering with a lawful business—the bus company—without “just cause.”

Lawyers for the MIA built a strong case to show that blacks did have “just cause” to boycott the buses. But Martin had little hope they would win the case—not before a white judge. He was right. The judge found Martin guilty.

Martin’s lawyers said they would take the case to a higher court. A huge crowd was waiting outside. As soon as they caught sight of Martin coming out of the courthouse they broke into cheers.

“Hail King!” a man cried.

“Hail the King!” someone else shouted.

“King is King!” another yelled.

“What happens now, Dr. King?” a reporter called out.

Martin smiled as he looked at the proud and happy people. “The movement goes on!” he answered.

Later that reporter talked to a friend. "You know," he said, "I've seen many mass movements, but nothing like this. It is one of laughter and song."

Now the Montgomery Improvement Association went to court. They asked a federal court to end all bus segregation in Montgomery. They said that it was unconstitutional—it was against the Constitution of the United States.

In May of 1956 the federal judges ruled in favor of the MIA. It was a big victory for the movement. But the city *still* refused to give up. They said they would take the case to the Supreme Court—the highest court in the land. Meanwhile, all that long, hot summer and into the fall, the boycott went on.

Then in November the city struck again. They took the MIA to court once more. This time they attacked the car-pool. They said it was destroying a private business—the bus line—so it should be stopped.

This new court case filled Martin with gloom. Another winter was approaching



and his people were bone tired. "It's just too much to ask them to continue," he said to Coretta, "if we don't have *any* transportation at all."

The night before the judge was to hand down his decision, Martin spoke quietly to still another mass meeting. He was sure that the judge would rule against them. "So tonight we must believe that a way will be found out of no way," he said sadly.

The next day as he sat quietly in court he looked at a clock on the wall. It was almost time for lunch. "The clock said it was noon," he said later, "but it was midnight in my soul."

Just then some people began to stir and whisper at the back of the room. Moments later a reporter ran up to Martin. "Reverend," he said, "this is what you've been waiting for!" And he shoved a piece of paper into Martin's hand.

As Martin read the paper his heart began to pound. The United States Supreme

Court had just decided that all bus segregation in Alabama was unconstitutional. It was over. They had won.

That evening there was a victory celebration at the Holt Street Baptist Church. Martin Luther King had tears in his eyes as he gazed out across the big auditorium filled with people. It had been a long journey they had taken together—this one-day boycott that had grown to almost a year. And they'd won much more than the right to ride unsegregated buses.

In the beginning many had been afraid. They had been filled with what Martin called "a sense of nobodiness." But not anymore. As a black janitor put it, "We got our heads up now and we won't ever bow down again."

That was the true miracle of Montgomery.