

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER III DONA VICTORIA

The Mexican girl took off her sombrero and threw back her reboso as she came under the thick, spreading shade of the giant tree. The dusky blue folds of the scarf lay around her neck and enhanced the picturesqueness of the head rising above it.

"What a magnificent creature!" Miss Rivers whispered to Thornton, and indeed the subject was the only one which could fitly be applied to Victoria Calderon. She was tall, vigorous, supple yet straight as an arrow, and any one familiar with the fine type of the Mayas, who are the original race inhabiting this region, would have recognized their traits in her length of limb, her stately bearing, and the free grace of her movements.

It was a very striking contrast which the young women made, as they sat down together—the loveliness of the one, so delicate, elusive, changeable, brilliant, so stamped like her dress with the fashion of the world; the beauty of the other belonging to the heroic order of classic sculpture and primitive races, — a type altogether in harmony with the scenes around them and suggestive of all things fresh and sylvan. It was natural that there should have been little conversation between them at first; but after dinner was over, and the men of the party stretched themselves out comfortably, with their cigars and cigarettes, to talk over, Miss Rivers invited her companion to share her seat among the great rocks, and proceeded to sound the gulf which she felt instinctively lay between them.

"Do you mean that you like the quebrada?" she asked. "Like it?" Miss Rivers called up all her Spanish to enable her to express her sentiments. "It is the most marvellous, the most wildly beautiful thing I have ever seen!" she declared. "The journey through it would alone repay me for coming to Mexico."

"How strange!" said the Mexican girl wonderingly. "Our ladies all dread the quebrada and find it terrible to travel here. They would rather stay down in the tierra caliente through all the heat than come up to the Sierra by this way. And you—a gringa—you like it!"

"I like it because I have been so differently brought up," she said. "Modern women—some of us at least—enjoy adventure and hardship and many things which women used to shrink from. I am not one of those who carry this to an extreme—who like, for example, to share their sports with men—but I like all these things wild and fresh and picturesque and out of the beaten way; and the quebrada is all of that, you know."

"But you look so—fine," the other persisted, her eyes still fastened in wonder on the face and figure before her. "I could never have imagined you would care for such things. When I saw you I wondered what you were doing here, and I thought how disgusted you must be."

the world, to educate yourself by travel, to enlarge your knowledge of men and things, to enjoy life while you are young, and—ah, oh, for many things!"

"I have heard of such feelings," said Miss Rivers slowly. She thought of the Swiss soldiers in their sign lands, dying of homesickness for their high green valleys and snowy peaks, their pure, clear mountain air. Was it strange that this daughter of the Sierra, nurtured amid the wild beauty which had power so deeply to impress even a stranger, could not live away from the great heights, could not feel any thing worth gaining which was to be bought at the price of exile from them? There is nothing of what is called civilization in such a feeling. It is, on the contrary, one of the deepest, as one of the strongest instincts, of primitive men, which civilization is doing its utmost to obliterate, and, as a rule, it only survives among simple and secluded people, a modern of the moderns herself, had never before encountered it, and her interest was deeply stirred. She possessed—it was indeed the great secret of her charm—that exquisite quality of sympathy to which "nothing that is human is strange"; and just now she felt strongly inclined to make a thorough, sympathetic study of this, to her, new type—this girl with the form of a Greek goddess and the eyes of a woodland fawn, of whom in a deeper than the Wordsworthian sense it might be truly said that Nature had made "a lady of her own."

"It is not strange," she observed gently, after a moment's silence, "that you should be so strongly attached to anything so wonderfully beautiful as this country of yours. I, who have only just entered it, feel its fascination already. I am afraid that all other scenery will seem tame to me hereafter."

"It was now Victoria's turn to show incredulity. "Do you mean that you like the quebrada?" she asked. "Like it?" Miss Rivers called up all her Spanish to enable her to express her sentiments. "It is the most marvellous, the most wildly beautiful thing I have ever seen!" she declared. "The journey through it would alone repay me for coming to Mexico."

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prised if I devote myself to her exclusively until we separate." "Oh, but I say—you don't really mean to do that?" "I really and certainly do. Why, it is a chance I would not miss for anything. She belongs to the country, she is a product of its influences, she is in every respect a child of the Sierra."

"And, therefore, she hasn't three ideas in common with you." "But I don't want people who have ideas in common with me. I want people who can give me something new; fresh, original. There she is, mounted and about to start. Good-bye! I am going to join her."

"Well, I'm—blessed!" Thornton said to himself, as he fell back and watched Miss Rivers ride sharply forward. There seemed nothing else to say in presence of a taste so eccentric as that which could prefer to himself and the opportunity to converse agreeably about social events at home, and people whom they both knew, a Mexican girl, ignorant of everything that anybody could possibly care to talk about. There was only one explanation, however, which quickly occurred to his mind. "Miss Rivers wants to improve her Spanish, he said, turning to Mackenzie, who came up just then; "so she is cultivating the lady of the Santa Cruz. Fortunately, the quebrada does not admit of two people riding together very long, and we have to be thankful that she hasn't taken a fancy to a Mexican man!"

Night was fast closing down on the quebrada; but the two horsemen, followed by a mule and pack-mule, who found themselves deep amid its wildest scenes, could perceive no sign of the shelter which they had expected to make. All day they had been riding, with heights of savage grandeur towering higher and higher above them: with the unceasing roar of rushing, falling water in their ears; with the rock-strewn way growing constantly rougher as the mountains drew nearer together, until the pass became no more than a narrow, winding defile, which constantly seemed to come to an end in the face of some tremendous, jutting cliff. Both men were well accustomed to hardship, but they had ridden with little rest since early morning. They were tired, and conscious of tired animals under them: they were wet from continual fording of the stream where even the most careful rider and sure-footed mule were likely at any moment to find themselves in a deep hole among the rocks over which the torrent foamed, and, besides being tired, they were extremely hungry. Under these circumstances it was not surprising that patience finally began to appear somewhat less than a virtue.

"I thought I knew something of rough country," Armistead remarked "but this exceeds anything I've ever seen. And this trail we are following is called a road, I suppose?" "Why not?" Lloyd asked. "Why shouldn't it be the King's Highway of camino real—if he likes? It's all the highway there is."

"I've been expecting it to turn into a squirrel track and run up a tree, but I begin to think now that it's a road, and we can't make this place we are looking for?" "We must make it; for there's no other place where we can get anything for our animals to eat."

"And how much farther do you think we have to go?" "Probably a league." "A league! Why you told me this morning it was only ten or twelve leagues from the place where we spent the night!" "So it was, but you have learned a hard lesson as to the quebrada, and we took a pretty long noon rest, you remember."

Armistead did remember, and, having had much experience in wild places and rough countries, said nothing more. So they rode on in silence for some time, while the strip of sky far above their heads, which during the day had burned with the blue fire of a jewel, now took a tender violet tint; while the stars—wonderfully large and golden in these high tropical altitudes—began to look down on them. In the depths of the great earth-rift twilight passes into night even more quickly than elsewhere; and the outlines of rocks and trees began to assume a certain indistinctness, while the voice of the river seemed to take a higher note as it poured downward over its rocks. A wonderful Alpine freshness came into the air, together with a thousand wild perfumes and scent of green, growing things.

Presently Armistead spoke again. "I shouldn't be surprised if we came upon the River party at this Guasi—whatever the name of the place is. You know they told us at Tamezula that the Gerente of the Caridad and his party had passed up the quebrada just before us."

haps the most admired girl in California?" "I didn't know it, but I haven't much trouble in believing it. She has a way with her, as the Irish say, that tends toward fascination. Even a case-hardened chap like myself is conscious of it."

"Oddly enough, never met her until we ran across them the other day at Guaymas," Armistead went on. "It's a queer whim that brings her to this country—a girl with the world, so to speak, at her feet and hosts of admirers and friends all over America and Europe,—but rare good luck for me. It's positively amazing—Lloyd was by this time accustomed to the note of self-complacency in the voice—"how my luck holds!"

"You consider the presence of Miss Rivers here as a proof of it?" "Of course. Any one might see that the presence of such a woman in such a place lends a flavor to life it would otherwise lack; and equally of course, the thing works the other way also."

"You mean that your presence will lend a flavor to life for Miss Rivers?" "I shouldn't put it exactly that way, but necessarily she will appreciate a man out of her own world when she meets him here than if she met him at home."

"No doubt,—the assent was sincere, a little dry. "Things do arrange themselves well for your benefit, one must confess."

"Always!" Armistead agreed, with the satisfaction which a prosperous man finds it hard to suppress, and which other men, especially the less prosperous, are likely to find irritating. "Things never fail to come my way just at the time I want them, and I have a pretty strong impression that they will continue to do so."

Lloyd made no response to this confident forecast, but as they rode on in the starlight a dim memory of old classic stories and legends, superstitions came to him. His thought of the Greek king casting his most precious jewel into the sea to propitiate the gods who had overwhelmed him with continued good fortune and avert the inevitable ruin of disaster. There seemed a certain absurdity in associating these memories with the man beside him, typical product of the hard, material, modern world. Yet, if the ancient gods are dead, who knows better than the man of today, whose only god after himself is Luck, that this strange power or influence, on which no one can confidently reckon, may change in a moment, and that to fight against it is like swimming against the ocean tide? Sooner or later such a luckless materialist goes under, and is heard of no more. It was possible that in the great Sierra, towering in austere majesty before them, failure was awaiting this man who so confidently boasted of never having known it; and who by such boast an old Greek would have believed, incurred the certain withdrawal of the fortune he was so trusting. This was the thought which flitted across Lloyd's mind, as if inspired by the ceaseless chant of the river beside them, or by the mystery of the night, so full of the suggestion of ancient memories. But he held his peace; and presently just as his keen eye caught something like the gleam of a star in the depths of the gorge ahead of them, the mule behind spoke:

"Look, señor! Yonder is Guasi millas." "So it is," Lloyd said to Armistead. "We're all right now." As they rode on, splashing across still another ford, the light enlarged rapidly, and they soon perceived that it was a camp fire, around which a considerable number of men and mules were gathered. "The River party!" Armistead said. "No," Lloyd disagreed. "That is not likely to be so large. What train is this?" he asked of one of the men around the fire.

"The conducta of the Santa Cruz Mine, señor," the man replied. "The conducta of the Santa Cruz Mine, señor," the man replied. "The conducta of the Santa Cruz Mine, señor," the man replied.

own flock. During the whole fight he was here, there, all over, helping the wounded."—Brooklyn Tablet.

HER BOY

A boyish soldier, with his left arm in a splint, led Father Parboyre through the hospital corridor to the shady corner of the veranda in which he loved to spend the long summer afternoons. The priest laughed at his own awkwardness in repeatedly brushing against the wall and then trying to sit on the arm of his chair. "I find that my eyes did more work than I ever gave them credit for," he said; and his face was as bright as his words were brave.

But the soldier-lad was not dull. He understood a little what blindness meant to the young priest, and, eager to give some comfort, he said briskly, "In time you will get used to not seeing. Why, I know a man at home who had one leg—he lost the other in a railroad accident—and it's wonderful how swiftly he hops about!"

Father Parboyre laughed again, amused by the boy's childishness, but grateful for the sympathy behind his words. "Perhaps, after a time, I'll be able to go about as well as your one-legged friend," he said. "So far I have shown only a marvelous aptitude for running into things and people, bumping my head, and breaking everything breakable."

There was to be a game of checkers in the ward, the last of an interesting series, so the soldier did not linger; but he had hardly gone when a smiling, weary-looking, old Sister came, with a miscal in one hand and a glass of water in the other. "It's school time, Father," she said, in her cheery way. "I have brought you a glass of water. It is hot this afternoon, and you must be thirsty. Drink it and then we'll have our lesson. Yesterday you knew half of the Epistle; perhaps you can learn the rest of it now. The Gradual is short and the Gospel not very long, so we are doing splendidly."

Father Parboyre's face was beaming. "Again, and again, and again I have repeated to myself the Introit and Collect and what I knew of the Epistle, lest I should forget them."

Blinded for life by a bit of shrapnel he was learning one Mass by heart under the tuition of old Sister Martha, who somehow found time to give him a lesson nearly every day. To say Mass again; that was his dream, the only one left when he awoke to the consciousness of a slight wound in his chest, another in his leg, and total blindness. A poor boy, gray and clever, and high-spirited, had longed to be a priest. His widowed mother had paid his way at college and the seminary by keeping a little candy shop; by working early and late and very hard; by dressing shabbily, and living on a scant allowance of the cheapest kinds of food; all the while feeling herself more than repaid by her boy's affection and her joy in the thought of his future.

Ordned at last, the early days of his priesthood, when Madame Parboyre assisted daily at his Mass and daily received Holy Communion from his hand, had been a time of inexpressible happiness for them both. Soon the War engulfed Europe. Father Parboyre's call and departure for the front followed quickly; and a few months later he was brought back to Paris with more than one wound and blind for life. Neither mother nor son uttered a word of complaint. Merry before, they were merry still, finding a humorous side even to the annoyances and inconveniences resulting from his affliction and her loss. In every week a kind neighbor took care of the candy shop, and Madame Parboyre spent some hours with her son. As to what his future could be no word had passed between them.

So, on that warm summer afternoon Sister Martha opened her missal, and for half an hour she and Father Parboyre worked hard. When he could repeat the Epistle from beginning to end without faltering she hurried away, fairly radiating exultation; and after she was gone he repeated his lesson again and again to himself and afterward to Father Martin, the chaplain, who listened encouragingly, and then said, with a quite apparent effort to make little of the matter. "I have to go into the city on business. I hope to get back before 6 o'clock, and may not be needed in the meantime. I told Sister Marie Auguste to come for you if a priest is wanted for an emergency case, I knew that you would not mind."

her own way and when she was quite ready. He knew that she would get herself in hand before she told him anything, and would then tell it jestingly, if she could.

So, for five or ten minutes, mother and son talked in humorous vein of common places; the weather, and the breeze that swept the veranda, and the perfumes it brought from the garden below. She made no excuse for being later than usual, and Father Parboyre seemed not to have noticed her tardiness.

After a time there was a lull in the conversation. Madame Parboyre drew off her shabby gloves, folded them carefully, and having put them into her bag studied her son's face, well knowing that he could not see her doing so. Suddenly she leaned forward and reverently kissed the hand that rested on the arm of his chair. "Jean," she said softly, "Jean dear, I have something to tell you."

"Yes, mother, I know that you have. I know it the moment you came," he replied; and they both laughed.

"You are laughing at your mother. You don't treat her with the proper respect," she scolded, with mock severity; and they laughed again.

There was a short silence before she began, in a very different tone. "I was late because I went first to St. Gaetan's Hospital. This morning I received a note from Father Beaumont asking me to go to see him. For three weeks, he said, he had tried to find time to come to me; but the hospital being over-crowded, he is busy day and night. He had not known that you are here, in Paris, but had heard that you were wounded."

She paused, and Father Parboyre leaned back in his chair, at a loss to imagine what was coming. That some happening had deeply moved her he had guessed before she introduced the subject; how deeply he had not suspected until she began her story in a voice that trembled in spite of a noticeable effort to keep it firm.

"Father Beaumont had a story to tell me—or rather, two stories," she continued. "He said—he said that some weeks ago, after there had been terrific fighting near Verdun, a number of mortally wounded soldiers were brought to St. Gaetan's Hospital. Among them was a man named Jean, as soon as he regained consciousness, begged to see the chaplain. He told Father Beaumont that he made his First Communion when he was twelve years old, and was faithful for a few months; after that little by little, he fell into indifference—or worse than indifference; but in the trenches and on the battlefield he saw much that edified him and made him think longingly of the faith of his childhood. I said, didn't I, that he was seriously wounded near Verdun? Jean, for hours the poor lad lay where he had fallen, and as he suffered there he determined that if his life was spared long enough he would make his peace with God. He grew very weak, and had begun to fear that he would die where he was, when a man crept out on the battlefield, heedless of the shells that still fell, and came close to the spot where he and a wounded comrade lay. To the poor boy's bitter disappointment it was his companion whom the man lifted to his back. 'I'll come back for you,' he promised. 'I'll come back, if I live.'"

There was a sob in Madame Parboyre's voice, but with hardly a pause, she went on, never glancing toward her son. "He—he did return; his clothes covered with mud, and a thin stream of blood pouring from a wound in his breast. He lifted the poor boy soldier to his back, and struggled toward our lines. The soldier, who grew very weak, and had begun to fear that he would die where he was, when a man crept out on the battlefield, heedless of the shells that still fell, and came close to the spot where he and a wounded comrade lay. To the poor boy's bitter disappointment it was his companion whom the man lifted to his back. 'I'll come back for you,' he promised. 'I'll come back, if I live.'"

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