

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER XXIII

NO MAN IS STRONGER THAN FATE.

The moon had gone down, but there was not as yet even a flush of color in the east when Lloyd mounted his horse and rode away from the Rivers camp. Starlight in abundance there was,—the brilliant starlight of this high region; but the forest shades were, nevertheless, dark as he rode alone over the trail where a few hours before he and Isabel had ridden together so fleetly and so gaily. But he had the true woodsman's eye and instinct; so, despite the deep shadows which lurked under the great trees, he had not wandered from his way when suddenly there was a stirring, sighing movement in the wide sea of verdure overhead, as a light breeze swept through it, and simultaneously a lightning through all the mysterious forest spaces, showing that day was at hand.

Nothing can be conceived more beautiful than morning in the Sierra. Toward daylight the air grows quite cold; and when the sun rises, his brilliant rays flash over a myriad diamonds of hoarfrost, gemming every blade of grass; and there is a thin rim of ice on any water which has been standing over night. The atmosphere has a sharp edge; but its divine, ozone-laden quality gives to mind and body a sense of almost incredible buoyancy and energy. Nor does the chill last long. The sun has hardly appeared above the pine-crested heights when the lovely frost has vanished, and grass, ferns, vines, leaves—the whole green, wonderful world is simply drenched in crystalline freshness. And then what exquisite mists rise in delicate, filmy wreaths and sprays out of the deep gorges, trailing their gossamer whiteness over the great, forest-clad shoulders of the hills, or lying as a crown upon the brows of the tall peaks! There is a stir of life in all the dewy forest coverts, where the gentle creatures in fur and feathers dwell. They are all rousing—the deer from their fragrant beds of fern; those gay wood sprites, the squirrels, from their chambers in the quiet arms of great trees; the birds in their leafy perches. For day has come—another long, beautiful, golden day in the fair, wild greenwood.

All this radiance was about Lloyd as he rode down into the Quebrada Onda, reaching the river in time to see the camp on the farther side just stirring. The stream had by this time fallen, so that it was easily forded; and he experienced no difficulty in riding across, with a glance toward a rock in mid-current where yesterday was it only yesterday or some long age ago—a figure light and graceful as that of nymph or dryad had stood.

The men who were saddling their mules around the camp fired on the knoll looked with some surprise at the solitary man—a senior, a gringo, and yet entirely unattended in these Sierra wilds—who rode up to them. "Buenos días, hombre!" he said. "Buenos días, señor!" they answered.

And then one, turning quickly around, uttered an exclamation. "Don Felipe!" he cried. "Come esta Vd., señor?"

"Ab, Luis!" said Lloyd, recognizing a man who had met him once before in his employ. How are you and what are you doing now?" "Very little, señor," the man replied. "At present I am with the señor Americano yonder"—he waved his hand toward the fire where a man sat taking his breakfast—"who is prospecting for mines in the Sierra."

"Prospecting, eh?" said Lloyd. He smiled. "I will go and speak to the señor Americano," he said. Dismounting, he walked over to the fire and passed before the American, who, with an expression of surprise, looked up at him.

"How do you do, Randolph?" he said coolly. "This is rather unexpected, meeting you here."

"Lloyd!" Randolph exclaimed. Involuntarily he rose to his feet, but neither man offered to shake hands with the other. They stood for an instant silently, with the dying embers of the fire between them; each noting the changes wrought by time, the ravages wrought by life in the face of the other. Then Randolph went on, a little hoarsely: "I heard that you were out in the Sierra somewhere."

"From Armistead, I suppose?" Lloyd answered, still coolly. "I have heard that you are doing his work." He sat down on a log near by. "May I ask for a cup of coffee?" he added. "I've been riding for several hours."

Randolph nodded to one of the Mexicans, who brought coffee and also some broiled meat and bread. "You needn't hesitate on the score of bread and salt," he said, as he resumed his own seat. "These are Armistead's provisions, not mine."

"So I supposed; and, as you perceive, I am not hesitating," Lloyd returned. But he ate absently and with little appetite, only drinking eagerly the strong black coffee, the stimulating effect of which he felt immediately. It was after he had drained his cup that he looked again at Randolph who had meanwhile continued his own breakfast.

"Are you going to the Santa Cruz by Armistead's orders?" he asked abruptly.

"Why should you think that I am going to the Santa Cruz at all?" Randolph asked in turn. "That question hardly calls for an answer," Lloyd rejoined. "I know Armistead's plans and intentions very thoroughly—you've probably heard that I came out from California with him, and we only parted company when I refused the job you have undertaken—so there's no good in trying to maintain a mystery with me. Prospecting will do with the men, but I know perfectly well where you are bound. What puzzles me is that Armistead should be making this move just now."

"Why is not now as good a time as any—granting that you are right?" Randolph asked. "Well, for one reason, because Miss Rivers has gone to Las Joyas," Lloyd answered; "and I happen to know that Armistead gave her a promise that no attempt against the Santa Cruz should be made while she was there."

"How do you happen to know that he made such a promise?" "That is an unimportant detail. The promise was undoubtedly given; and, unless I am much mistaken in Armistead, he would not wish to break it."

"Then he should have changed his orders. I have a letter from him in my pocket telling me to—er—carry out our plans about the prospects in the Sierra as soon as I was ready. So I am on my way to carry them out, and I have nothing whatever to do with any promise he may or may not have made to Miss Rivers."

Lloyd's glance swept comprehensively over the group of men near by before he answered. There were about a dozen, well-picked men for the purpose in view: sinewy, vigorous sons of the Sierra; belonging to the class which drifts from mining camp, to mining camp, possessing few ties and fewer scruples, and from which what may be called the desperate class of the country is recruited. Well mounted and well armed, they formed a very effective corps for such work as Randolph had in hand; recognizing this, Lloyd nodded with a certain air of approval.

"You have done exceedingly well in getting up your party," he said. "You have secured exactly the right material for such an enterprise. But to take the Santa Cruz you would need to multiply them by five, if not by ten."

Randolph stared. "You seem to know a wonderful deal about it," he said. "I was at the Santa Cruz not many days ago," Lloyd answered; "and I am able to assure you that they are not only expecting some step of this kind on the part of Mr. Trafford's agent, but are prepared to resist it. They have five—ten—well-armed men where you have one; and anybody who knows the mine will tell that if defended, it is impregnable."

Randolph, looking a little startled, now dropped all pretense of mystery. Armistead has been expecting to surprise the mine," he said. "He hasn't counted on resistance."

"If you are wise, you will count on it," returned Lloyd, grimly. "If ever men were in earnest and determined to defend their property, those men at the Santa Cruz are. Of course—he rose to his feet—"you can give just what weight you please to this information. It is not intended as a friendly warning at all; for, frankly, I don't care in the least whether you and your men—precious scoundrels the most of them—are shot down like dogs or not. I have simply told you the state of affairs; and if you would please Armistead by making a tragical fiasco of his plan to surprise the mine, you have only to go on. Good day!"

He strode away to his horse, which Luis was holding at a little distance; but before he was in his saddle Randolph was at his side.

"See here, Lloyd," he said, in a voice a little shaken with anxiety, "you may not have meant your information for a friendly warning; but all the same it is friendly, you know,—if things are as you have stated."

"You can believe my statement or not, as you like," Lloyd answered with curt importance. "It hasn't been for your sake that I have warned you."

"Oh, I know that well enough!" the other interposed. "And you may remember sufficient about me to judge whether or not I am likely to make statements which are untrue."

"I remember," Randolph said. "There isn't any room to doubt your truthfulness. So it comes to this: if I go on, I'm leading a forlorn hope with but the least chance of success."

"Just that," said Lloyd, tightening his girths a little. "And I'll be hanged if I care to lead forlorn hopes for the benefit of Trafford, who is sitting at ease in San Francisco with more money already than he can count. I shall go back to Canelas and communicate with Armistead. If he chooses to increase his forces and to lead himself, I've no objection to accompanying him; but I won't take the responsibility alone."

"A sensible as well as a prudent resolution," commented Lloyd, springing into his saddle. "You may be quite sure that you could not take the Santa Cruz with five hundred men; though if Armistead has a mind to try, that is his affair. But, as you've observed, there is no apparent reason why you should risk your life in his and Trafford's interest."

"Not the least," Randolph agreed; "although it is a life pretty well

without value," he added, a little bitterly. Lloyd gave him a quick, keen glance. "You don't look as if you had been making it very valuable of late," he observed dryly.

"I've been going to the dogs as fast as a man could go," Randolph said. "And I don't mean to put the blame on my transgressions also together on other shoulders, but—"

"Best keep it on your own," Lloyd interrupted sternly. "After all, nothing—nobody—can drag a man down without consent of his own will."

Randolph laid his hand on the neck of the horse and looked up into the sternly set face above him, with its resolute mouth and jaw. There was something wistful in the gaze, which kept Lloyd from abruptly riding on. He could not disregard the mute appeal in those eyes, which contained also a confession of weakness and pain.

"That's easy for you, perhaps," said Randolph. "Nothing—nobody—could drag you down into the depths where I've been. But, unless I'm mistaken, you have been into some depths of your own; and if you've learned there anything that will help a man in a fight with misery and loneliness and self disgust, and—all the forces of hell, I'd like to know it."

There was a moment's pause. It was a strange appeal, considering the past relations of these men, considering all that stood between them and made friendship in the ordinary conventional sense impossible. But conventional things—codes, injuries, feeling—all seemed far away in this world where they had met; this virgin world of God, where only elemental things have a place,—the great elemental passions and hopes of man, which can raise him so high or cast him so low; and the great verities of life and death, of time and of eternity. These things abide in the Sierra; and here, as it were unconsciously, Lloyd had meditated upon them until they sank into his heart; taught him something, at least, of their divine wisdom; prepared him somewhat to answer this strange appeal of one human soul to another,—this cry for help uttered out of the dark depths to one who was at least a brother in suffering, but who while suffering had wrested from pain its noble secret of strength.

These thoughts passed through his mind swiftly, together with a revelation—dim but convincing—of a purpose which had led him here quite different from any purpose which he had conceived. "Kismet!" he had said the day before when he met Isabel Rivers in the quebrada, and again when the storm had imprisoned them in the cave within the cliff; but now, as by a flash of apprehension, he seemed to see what that fate had been preparing for him. Only this—only an appeal to which he felt that he dared not close his ears; only a cry for help from a man who in a certain sense had injured him, and whose claim, therefore, upon him, according to that divine code which all men recognize to be divine because so difficult, was not to be disregarded.

"If you have decided to turn back," he said, after a pause which seemed to him long but was in reality very short, "you might as well come along with me. Our way is probably the same."

CHAPTER XXIV AT LOS CHARCOS Not far from the case grande of Las Joyas there was a spot near the base of the hills which surrounded the beautiful valley, known as Los Charcos (she pools), because here the stream from the canon of the Santa Cruz fell into a succession of rocky basins, and lay, or seemed to lie, in each, motionless as a mirror, reflecting, tree arched, giving back with clear faithfulness the over-shadowing greenery and the glimpses of jewel-like sky above.

The lovely place had enchanted Miss Rivers when she was first led to it by Victoria; and nothing pleased her so much as to go there afterward—often alone, and, while she sat or lay in the deep green shade by the side of the mirroring water, let the marvellous beauty of Nature echo into her soul and fill it as the chalice of a flower is filled with dew. Many thoughts came to her in these hours, when the flowing tide of time seemed, like that of the stream beside her, to stand still; when nothing broke the wonderful greenwood stillness, and only the shifting of the shadows showed that the round earth was swinging on its tireless way, and that after a while another golden day would go down to death.

"Oh, it is so perfect!—so perfect!—why must it end?—why can it not last?" she exclaimed one day, more to herself than to Victoria, although the latter was seated beside her on the grassy bank. She threw herself back as she spoke, clasping her hands behind her head and looking upward at the canopy of verdure over them and the dazzling heaven beyond. "One becomes an absolute pagan," she said with a little sigh. "One wants to pour out a libation to the spirit of the woods or do something of the sort." Then she laughed; for she had been speaking English, and Victoria looked puzzled. "It is as well that you have not understood me," she said in Spanish; "for I have been talking like a pagan. Now, I can not express pagan sentiments in Spanish. It is impossible."

"Why is it impossible?" Victoria asked; for she had often difficulty in following the thoughts of her com-

panion,—a girl like herself, and yet with so wide a gulf of difference between them, that there were times when each found it very hard to comprehend the other.

"Because Spanish is in its genius such a religious language, so stately, so noble, so made to be a vehicle for the great thoughts of great saints about eternal truth," Isabel answered. "One simply can't be frivolous in Spanish, and of course playing at paganism is being very frivolous."

"I don't think that you are ever frivolous," said Victoria. "Oh, yes, I am—distressingly so sometimes!" Miss Rivers replied. "But frivolity apart, I can not tell you how glad I am to have come out into this wonderful, beautiful—indeed, beautiful—Sierra world of yours. I am so grateful to you for asking me to come."

"I did not think that you would care about it," said Victoria. "It is so wild, so lonely here. But the Señor Lloyd assured me that you would like to come."

"The Señor Lloyd knew," said Isabel, smiling, as if to herself. "He knows a great deal, the Señor Lloyd," she added. "He is a very sympathetic person; he understands more than one expresses sometimes."

"Yes," Victoria assented, "he is very sympathetic." She was silent for a moment before she went on. "I never thought that there were any gringos like him," she said.

"There are not a great many," Isabel answered. "I have never met any one quite like him. He gives you the impression of being so—detached, as it were; so free from thought or care for himself, and yet so full of consideration for others."

"He is very unhappy," said Victoria simply. Miss Rivers sat up, quickly and stared at her. "Now, how did you find that out?" she asked.

"The dark eyes met her own quietly and directly. "Is it not plain?" the girl asked. "Have you not known it?" "I have felt it—guessed it, perhaps," the other answered; "but I cannot say that I have known it. He does not wear his heart on his sleeve, the Señor Lloyd—which means, you know, that he does not talk of himself and his troubles, or 'pose, as we say in English, as one whose life has disappointed him, deeply, enormously. One is sure of that. One is also sure that there is no remedy for his trouble, except a certain divine remedy which he has never found."

"You mean?" "I mean, of course, divine faith and the healing that it has for all human wounds, the answer for all human perplexities."

"I know," said Victoria, regretfully, "that he is a heretic." "Not a heretic in the old sense," answered Isabel. "He is more of a pagan—a modern pagan."

"As you called yourself a minute ago?" "Oh, no, no! I was playing at being an ancient pagan—a joyous worshiper of Nature, and we fancy those to have been to whom God was never directly revealed. Modern pagans are altogether different. They have forgotten God and His revelation, and their creed is a very joyless one of pure materialism. Some of them—like Mr. Lloyd—cling to high ideals of truth and honor and duty; but they see no meaning or purpose in the sufferings of life and it hardens and embitters them."

"I do not think that he is hardened and embittered," said Victoria, slowly. "But he is hopeless, and that is worse."

Miss Rivers looked at the speaker meditatively for a moment before she answered. "It is a little strange," she said at last, "how you have found all this out."

"No it is not strange," the girl answered simply. "When one cares for a person, one can tell very easily how things are with him."

Miss Rivers gave a little gasp. Surely this was unexpected frankness! She had suspected something of the kind—had not been unwilling to probe a little,—but such an avowal was as far as possible from what she had anticipated. For a moment she did not answer. Then she said: "And you—care for him?"

"Very much," Victoria answered with the same simplicity. "He is dear to me," she went on in the beautiful Spanish which English words so inadequately render "not only because he has been a friend and done us a great service to prove his friendship, but because he is himself—so sympathetic, as you have said, so full of understanding for the way and thoughts of others, so kind and gentle, so much of a true caballero in all things, even though he is a gringo."

TO BE CONTINUED

ERIN, THE TEAR AND THE SMILE IN THINE EYES

Erin, the tear and the smile in thine eyes, Blend like the rainbow that hangs in the skies, Shining through sorrow's stream, Sa'dening through pleasure's beam, Thy suns with doubtful gleam weep while they rise.

Erin, thy silent tear or shall cease; Erin, thy arguid smile or shall increase. Till, like the rainbow's light, Thy various tints unite And form in heaven's sight one arch of peace!

—MOORE

BEFORE THE FALL

By Bernard Yessens

Leo Rynlewski drew from every one a second glance. He was handsome; but it was not his good looks which attracted attention. Not his tall, graceful frame, but the sinewy strength of it; not the clean-cut, well-chiselled face, but its habitual expression of conscious, dominant power which thrilled the observer.

The impression one got from his eyes was that of stabbing, blue-steel lances rather than two large, deep-blue orbs of light. His thin nostrils seemed to have been forever dilating with the rush of battle; in the straight line of his finely formed mouth and in the outward thrust of his knob like chin strength obliterated all other qualities.

He dominated in any gathering. To see him rise at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon and lash the iniquities of the city government, carrying those big men of the town out of themselves with enthusiasm, was to behold a sight magnificent, indeed. And to watch him, the son of an immigrant miner, an ex-factory youth, at a dazzling social function, chatting at his ease, the center of interest—this was to marvel and draw back with awe.

Was it any wonder his own people idolized him? Was it strange that they should fill his bank with their money and christen their children after him? Leo Rynlewski was the greatest product from their ranks, an example of what hard work could do in this new world, an earnest of the big things their children should accomplish. In his strength, in his ability, in his own hope, ambition and determination reflected.

In that face they detected nothing ugly, nothing brutal or ruthless. Few people did. Its strength seemed a noble strength, its power frank and open. Some keen observers could pick a blemish—as old Father Polwicz, who had baptized the baby Leo and knew that face when it had been sweet and appealing. But Father Polwicz said nothing.

Father Polwicz stepped rather timidly across the mezzanine lobby of the exclusive Raquet Club. On being informed by the dapper clerk that Mr. Rynlewski was in and would see him, he made his way to the latter's suite.

There, however, he was welcomed not by the occupant but by a smiling Jap, who bowed him into a luxurious living room.

"Master just come back from ride," explained the servant. "His dressing. He say you wait only minute."

Father Polwicz sat down, selecting the one stiff back chair the room contained. He glanced round. Evidences of wealth lay scattered everywhere—in the rich Arabian rug in front of the fireplace, the buhl table covered with magazines, the mahogany bookcases lining the tinted walls. Evidences of paganism and voluptuousness, too, in the pictures and statuary. The priest made a grimace, shifting impatiently in his chair.

Presently Rynlewski entered, wearing a smart smoking jacket, looking fresh from a cold bath. "Ah, Father Polwicz!" he exclaimed, taking his visitor's hand in both his own. "It is always good to see you. Sit down."

He offered a cigar box, which the priest brushed away. "But you'll excuse me?" he said, opening a monogrammed gold cigarette case. He threw himself into a huge rock chair, crossed his legs and blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"Well, Father, how large is the check to be this time?" "Nothing, Lec." Father Polwicz laughed unessily. He was a trifle overawed. "I really did not come for a check."

"No?" said Rynlewski. His lips were still smiling, but his eyes pierced like a sword. "No, I—I— The priest floundered a moment; then burst out: "Oh, Leo, it is true?"

"Is what true?" Rynlewski questioned softly, his eyes growing colder and colder. "This news that you are to marry Margaret Hyde."

"It is true." "And in the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul?" "Yes; that also is true." "Oh, Leo! Leo!" The gray head bent down in grief. "And we were so proud of you—so proud of you!"

A flicker of amusement passed over Rynlewski's face. He tapped his cigarette on the ash tray. "This news should make you prouder still," he murmured lightly. "I am to marry into the greatest family in this great city. I have won the most beautiful girl in the State."

"This news!" Father Polwicz repeated, looking up; "do you know what it will do? It will ruin you—utterly, irrevocably!" "Perhaps." The banker's now plainly cruel lips were parted in a cold, indulgent smile. "I shall not worry. Fortunately, religious convictions left me some years ago."

"Oh, yes," the priest said without resentment "as a priest I know your contemplated act will probably damn your soul beyond repair. That grieves me most of course. But it is not all. As a fellow Pole I know your marriage will ruin your life in this world, also. It will break you financially. It will topple you from your lofty conceit as quick as lightning."

"You prophecy!" sneered Rynlewski. "Pray, when did you receive the gift?" "My dear Leo," Father Polwicz said in a voice commiseratingly

wrathful, "it takes not the gift of prophecy but only a thorough knowledge of my people to foretell what will happen when news of your marriage in a Protestant church becomes known. Do you know your race so ill as to believe they will continue to patronize an apostate? The morning of your marriage you will be facing financial failure."

Rynlewski stretched out his legs and smothered a yawn. He spoke pleasantly. "It's quite astonishing how you priests ever got your reputation for knowing human nature. After all, how could you? You do not mix with people; you see them mainly in confession, where they are strained out of their natural, normal selves. Now you seem to think the kind of religion I profess matters to my customers. Absurd! Haven't the newspapers often mentioned the fact that for the past five years I have spent practically every Sunday morning paying golf?"

"But they knew you were still a Catholic, however lax in your duties. Didn't they know?" Father Polwicz asked eagerly, "that you paid for my school—that you gave \$50,000 to St. Casimir's? Didn't they hear you address the society each year?"

"Yes," said Rynlewski. "And I say my influence with them is so great no harm can come from my marriage. On the contrary, I shall probably draw lots of them out of the Church with me."

"I know you will, you black apostate!" cried the priest fiercely. He leaped up and shook his fist under Rynlewski's nose. "Don't you know that's why I came here to plead with you? Go to your own doom if you wish, but for the sake of the saintly old father who brought you to me for the cleansing waters of baptism just thirty five years ago this month—out of respect for his sacred memory do not drag other souls down with you."

His tone of anger changed to one of pleading. "Marry this Protestant girl if you must, Leo. But do not damn other weak, vain souls by flaunting your contempt of the Church for whom to see and emulate. Please don't let me see hardly hurt you to have the ceremony performed by a priest, can it?"

"I suppose not. But, you see," Rynlewski explained easily, "my fiancée naturally wishes to be married by her uncle, Bishop Harding."

"Yes, I see," said the priest with infinite scorn. "Oh, yes, I see! I see if I had the tongue of men and angels I could not move you from what you have set your vain heart on. Yes, I see! I see that this marriage in fashionable St. Paul's has been the dream of your proud life. Well, go on and consummate it. It is your hour of triumph. But I say to you, young man," Father Polwicz thundered, "it will be the last sweet morsel your pride will ever taste. Thank God—the priest's voice rang strong and clear—the mighty bulk of my people have a loyalty to the Church no power on earth can weaken. The minority which will follow you will be pitifully inconsequential—mere handful. Your fall is as certain as the tide."

"Father, your name should have been Jeremiah," Rynlewski said mockingly as the priest departed. He lit another cigarette with the bored air. Never did he seem more powerful, never more sure of himself.

Some weeks later he rang the bell at Father Polwicz's residence. And he was a changed man. His haggard countenance, his heavy-lidded eyes little suggested power. Neither did his careless dress. Father Polwicz opened the door himself.

"Come in," he said, after his first start of surprise. He led the way to his bare study.

"So then, the rumor that your engagement is broken is true?" "Yes, Father," Rynlewski sat down and put a hand to his hot forehead. "It was only my money she cared for," he said tonelessly. "Just as you predicted, things began to break the very morning after the public announcement, that I would be married out of the church, and as weeks went by and conditions grew worse and worse, I went to her and told her what might happen. I offered to release her. And she accepted without a quaver."

"You may not believe it, Father," he went on after a moment, "but it does not matter now. It is strange—it must be the prayers of my dear old father—but I am glad now—have been glad this last hour—that things turned out as they did."

He looked up; a smile illuminated his face, which, if no longer suggesting power, at least showed a native courage and strength. "I came to see about renting a seat, Father," he said with an old shyness. "I'm not going to spend my Sundays after this playing golf!"

"Oh, Leo! Leo!" cried old Father Polwicz, tears in his eyes. "Leo," he said, going over and putting his hands on Rynlewski's head, "Leo, my boy, I am so glad! Upon the firm foundation of humble faith, dear Leo, you'll build again your great business, have no fear."—Rosary Magazine.

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