

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER XX—CONTINUED

"And you were thrown—"
"By my horse. Now, lest you should say that so good a horseman should not have been thrown, I had better admit that Don Arturo Vallejo had hold of the bridle of the horse, and there was something in the nature of—or a struggle going on."

"He evidently crossed it at the beginning of the storm, before the water rose so high. Then, thinking you were ahead, he pushed on as soon as he possibly could. The tracks are very plain."
"How unfortunate!" she exclaimed, with deep concern. Then, seizing the only practical conclusion, added: "We must follow as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXII

A RIDE IN THE GREENWOOD

Twilight falls soon in the Quebrada Onda. Long before the sun has ceased to gild the upper world, shadows gather in the great earth-rib and darkness falls there, while yet all the lovely spaces of the sky above are filled with light. Under the mighty rock which formed the roof of the cave where the little party of three had taken refuge, the shadows naturally gathered earliest; and it was the perception of advancing darkness which presently brought Miss Rivers to her feet with an air of determination.

"Mr. Lloyd," she said, "I have made up my mind. If you could ride through that water, I can. It is only a question of getting wet, and that doesn't matter."
"I am afraid you will find that it matters very much," said Lloyd, as she also rose, conscious of a sense of relief; although he felt bound to remonstrate, for the falling shades had filled him with a disquiet which was reflected in the gravity of his face. "You will be wetted to your waist," he added, warningly.

"It doesn't matter," she repeated. "We must get away from here. Night is at hand. Could we ride up that mountain in the night?"

"It would be extremely dangerous to attempt to do so."

"Well, you see, then, how necessary it is to lose no time in starting. My father must be very anxious about me, and the only way to relieve his anxiety is to go to him. Please look that my saddle is all right."

"I will change it to my horse, if you have no objection. He is taller than your mule."

The exchange was made, the young lady mounted, and they rode down from the eyrie which had so unexpectedly become a trap, into the current of the swirling river. To Lloyd's very great relief, the water had fallen a little. It was still high—very high—and once or twice there seemed danger that the animals would lose their footing; but they passed safely around the cliff and then to the higher ground at the edge of the quebrada. Isabel laughed a little as they splashed through the shallower water.

"To dare is generally to succeed," she said. "Why didn't I ride out with you when you tried this before, or at least as soon as you came back?"

"It was higher then," said Lloyd; "and I really think that you are sufficiently wet as it is."

He dismounted as he spoke—for they had now reached dry ground—and regarded her soaked feet and skirts a little ruefully. But she laughed again as he assisted her from the saddle, which was now to be changed again to her mule.

"What does a little wetting matter?" she asked. "I am sure I shall suffer no harm from it; and as for discomfort—bah! One would expect to rough it a bit. I should have been very much disappointed if I had met with no adventures."

Lloyd laughed in turn, so delightful was her gay good humor.

"It is plain that the Sierra intends to give you all that it has to give, adventures among the rest," he said as he unbuckled girths and assisted Manuel to change the saddles.

Miss Rivers meanwhile looked up at the sky, which seemed so very far above their heads.

"It is not as late as I thought," she observed. "Possibly the sun may yet be in evidence somewhere. If only we can gain the top of the mountain before dark—ars you quite sure papa has gone on ahead, Mr. Lloyd?"

"I don't think there can be a doubt of it," Lloyd replied. "There was every sign of a party having passed across about the time the storm began; and as I suppose Mr. Rivers was not very far behind you—"

"Certainly not very far," he said. "It must have been his party. So—why, hello! what's that?"

Isabel's gaze followed his, which had suddenly fixed itself on a point above the river, and she saw at once what he had arrested his attention. It was the leaping blaze of a camp-fire, kindled on a low spur of the mountain which rose on the other side of the quebrada. The same thought came to her as to him.

"Can it be papa?" she exclaimed. Lloyd turned to Manuel.

"Do you think that is Don Roberto?" he asked. The Mexican gazed keenly for an instant across the quebrada, and then shook his head.

"No, señor," he answered, "that is not Don Roberto. Those are not the mules or the men of the Caridad."

Lloyd looked at Miss Rivers. "I think he is right," he said. "Shall we go on—or would you like more certainty?"

"They are not field-glasses," she said, as she handed them to Lloyd; "but they are very good of their kind, and will enable you to tell who is over there."

Indeed as soon as Lloyd had adjusted the focus to his vision he saw with perfect clearness that the group of men and animals on the hillside was not the Caridad party. But, although immediately convinced of this, he did not lower the glasses from his eyes, but continued to gaze through them for a minute or two.

"Certainly not Mr. Rivers nor any of the Caridad people," he said positively. "But I'd like to know who they are."

"Arrieros, perhaps?"

"No; for they have no packs, and they seem, from the number of animals, to be all mounted. It is a travelling party clearly, and I am a little curious to know if a suspicion I have is correct. Here, Manuel, take these glasses and tell me if you ever saw any of those men before."

Manuel took the glasses, and had hardly looked through them before he uttered an exclamation.

"But yes, señor," he said. "I know almost all of them. They are men from Canelas, and even—yes, there is Pepe Vargas from Tamezula, and Tobalito Sanchez and Cruz and Pancho Lopez. Caramba! but it is wonderful to see men's faces like this, at such a distance."

"How do you know the señor who is with them?"

Manuel hesitated before replying. "He has his hat pulled over his face so that I can't be sure," he said, "but he looks to me like an American whom I have seen in Topia with the Señor Armistead."

Lloyd nodded as his eyes met those of Miss Rivers.

"It is as I thought," he said. "What do you mean?" she asked quickly. "It can't be that you think it is the party for the Santa Cruz?"

"It is just that I am pretty sure."

"But Mr. Armistead promised—"

"Sometimes the undue zeal of subordinates can be made to account for broken promises, or there may really be no intention of breaking the promise. I'll find out what is intended as soon as possible. The river is too high to cross now."

"How will you find out?"

"By a few discreet inquiries when I return here, which will be as soon as we find Mr. Rivers."

A smile came into Miss Rivers' eyes and curved her lips.

"I believe you mentioned a little while ago that you were resolved to leave the Santa Cruz matter severely alone in future," she remarked.

"The Santa Cruz matter will not leave me alone, it appears," Lloyd answered a little grimly, as with his hand under her foot, he lifted her lightly into the saddle.

"I wish you did not feel it necessary to go so much out of your way by accompanying me," she said as she gathered up her reins. "Manuel can very well take care of me."

"You must know that it is impossible for me to think of leaving you until I have seen you safely with your father," Lloyd replied, as he swung into his own saddle.

And something in his rather a shade of stern resolution in rather than of pleasure or of compliment, made her feel that further protest was useless. It also amused her a little; for such was not the tone usually employed by men whom fortune gave the opportunity of serving her.

So they commenced the toilsome ascent out of the deep chasm, along the difficult and perilous trail which Lloyd had descended earlier in the day. Its difficulty, and peril were very much increased by the torrents of rain which had lately fallen upon the mountain side, washing away soil, dislodging rocks, in places entirely effacing the path. The animals struggled gallantly over the obstacles of the way, the slender-legged mules climbing like cats; but such vigilant attention was required on the part of the riders that not even Isabel had any attention to spare for the noble view which opened as they climbed higher—the great world of heights, clefts by dark gorges and faced by sun-smitten cliffs, that unrolled like a scroll around them, spreading until its blue distance blended into the blue infinity of the sky.

But when at last they gained the final summit and paused for their panting animals to rest, they found themselves not only "ringed with the azure world," but in a realm of radiant light. For dark as had seemed the gathering shades in the quebrada, the sun had been, as Isabel conjectured, in evidence elsewhere, and was now just sinking with magnificent resplendency behind the far, western heights; while in the eastern heaven the moon floated like a great silver balloon in the pellucid depths of sapphire. Over the whole vast scene, the wide expanse of the virgin world, so full of primeval grandeur, so high uplifted into the bright sky, was breathed a charm of freshness, remoteness, repose altogether indescribable. Isabel drew in a deep breath of the marvellous air; while she opened her arms as if she longed to fly away, out over the trackless wilds, the swirling waters, the hanging woods and falling waters, straight into the dazzling glories of the golden and rose-red western heaven.

"Be satisfied," he said. "You send your imagination like a bird to gather in all the beauty you do not see."

"But there is so much that I shall never see!" she replied,—and then she laughed. "How foolish I am, and she said, "when what I have seen and do see is too much for me to take in! And now I suppose we must go on."

"Yes, and ride fast."

Which proved to be possible; for now the trail led them over a plateau, level and open as a royal park, though covered with superb forest, where the great pines and evergreen oaks rose in columned stalactites to immense height, their interlacing boughs forming overhead a canopy of wandering breeze woke a murmur like the voice of the sea. And as they rode, fast as their animals could be urged to go, down these enchanting vistas, with the breeze which fanned their faces bringing to them all the wild fragrances of hundreds of leagues of mighty woods, the delight of motion added to the delights of sight and sound and scent seemed to make life for the moment a thing of simple pleasure.

And then the trail carried them along mountain crags, where the wooded steeps fell sharply away to ward a lower world of glorious blues and purples, which glamed and glowed between the straight stems of the giant trees and through their crowns of verdure; or it skirted the tips of foaming torrents, which flung their waters over tremendous precipices into green abysses far below, or led them through glades of yellow blue deep between bold hills. But there was ever about the way that sea-like murmur of unnumbered leaves, together with the music of swiftly flowing streams; while the earth breathed forth perfumes like a censer, and the sweet air was like a sensible benediction from the radiant bending sky.

And as they rode, day melted into night so softly that it was difficult to tell where one ended and the other began. But the last tint of sunset color had faded, and the moon was flinging her fairy light over their way and marking it with delicate shadows, when they finally overtook Mr. Rivers and his party in a stream-bed, where a halt had been made usual cheer in progress. Indeed, Mr. Rivers was in the saddle, and the intention, he explained, of returning to the Quebrada Onda, when his daughter rode up. The relief with which he greeted her was very great, and the expression of his thanks to Lloyd left nothing to be desired in the way of cordiality; but after this it was natural that there should be some expression of the irritation which had mingled with his anxiety.

"I have had scouts after you in all directions," he said to his daughter; "and when it became clear that you were not ahead, they led nothing to do but to go back to the infernal quebrada. It was clearly impossible that we could have passed you under ordinary circumstances, that I was forced to think you must have met with some serious accident."

"I am very sorry to have caused you so much anxiety," Isabel murmured regretfully.

"I've had a pretty uncomfortable afternoon, I assure you," her father returned; "and have quite determined to keep you under my eye, in future."

"If you had kept me under your own eye, I should have been as thoroughly drenched as you no doubt were in the storm," Isabel said; "but thanks to having met Mr. Lloyd, I had the pleasure of watching it from the shelter of a delightful cave."

"Hum!" said Mr. Rivers. "It was very lucky for you that you met Lloyd, and keeping dry was highly desirable; but as for finding pleasure in that downpour, in a cave or elsewhere—I can only say that I was extremely far from doing so; having been only drenched, as you observe, but harassed with apprehension about you. Well, I take care that you don't wander out of sight any more. Now, men" (peremptorily in Spanish), "go to work and make the camp."

A little later, when this labor was over—the tent pitched, the fire made and supper prepared—Mr. Rivers, mood underwent a change. Irritation was forgotten in the pleasant relaxation and sense of comfort which it quite so where to be experienced in the greenwood after a day of hard riding. There was only light talk, pleasant laughter and jesting as they gathered around the fire, which threw its rich radiance over the rocky escarpment of the hillside overhanging the camp, over masses of foliage and the figures of men and animals. The stream near by chanted its sweetest possible song as it hurried over its stones; and all the fragrant, pungent odors which night and recent rain draw forth in the forest filled the air, mingling with the aroma of the delightful Mexican berry from the coffee-pot placed on some red embers at the edge of the fire.

With appetites agreeably sharpened by the keen air, and spirits filled with the charm of this delightful gyping, they feasted well, the varied contents of Lucio's old-fashioned provision chest; and then came an hour or so of smoking on the part of the men, and more pleasant talk on the part of all; while Isabel reclined on a bright-colored blanket, and the firelight played over her sunny hair and lit up the smiling loveliness of her lips and eyes, frank as those of a thoroughbred boy, charming as those of a nymph. And then it was that that other campfire down in the depths of the Quebrada Onda, Mr. Rivers remembered and mentioned. Mr. Rivers looked grave when he heard of the revelations of the opera glasses.

"I don't like this at all," he said. "Nothing could possibly be more awkward, more undesirable in every way, than that we should be the guests of Dona Beatriz Calderon when her mine is attacked by Americans."

"I can't believe that anything of the kind is possible," remarked Isabel. "Mr. Armistead promised me that no attempt to take the mine should be made while I am at Las Joyas; and I think—"

she glanced at her father appealingly—"that Mr. Armistead is a gentleman."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly a gentleman," Mr. Rivers replied hastily. "But—"

even gentlemen permit themselves to do strange things occasionally. If Manuel really recognized those men, and if that fellow Randolph is with them, it looks—well, it looks very much as if we had better turn around to-morrow morning and go back to Topia; for I had no intention of being mixed up directly or indirectly, in this affair of the Santa Cruz."

"Papa, I can't—I really can't go back to Topia!" Isabel declared. "If Mr. Armistead has been guilty of such treachery, I want to stay and help to fight him."

"That is exactly what can't be permitted, my dear," her father answered. "I am afraid I was very wrong to yield to your desire of coming out here at all just now. But you see, she looked at Lloyd—"I wasn't altogether sorry to show in this way my sincere respect for you and sympathy with Dona Beatriz. "Dona Beatriz deserves all the respect and sympathy which can possibly be shown to her," said Lloyd; "and, if you will allow me to offer advice, I think you should permit Miss Rivers to continue on her way to Las Joyas. Her visit there is expected, and will be deeply appreciated."

"But if these men behind us are going to seize the mine?"

"They will not seize it. Of that I assure you. An attempt to do so will only result in injury to themselves. But, like Miss Rivers, I find it difficult to believe that even an attempt is to be made now. Armistead, within certain limitations, is a gentleman, and he would not violate his own word so flagrantly."

"What can those fellows be after, then?"

"That I am going back to see as soon as my horse has finished feeding. It is a beautiful night for riding."

"But not for going down into the Quebrada Onda,—no night is beautiful enough for that. Wait until morning."

"No; for then they will be on the road and I want to get them in camp. That is the place to find out things."

"And if you find out that they are going to the Santa Cruz?"

"Then I may be able to offer Randolph some advice which will induce him to turn back."

Mr. Rivers glanced a little curiously at the quiet face on which the firelight shone.

"Do you know the man?" he asked.

"I think I do," Lloyd answered slowly. "Then, perhaps to escape further questioning, he rose to his feet. At the same moment Miss Rivers rose also."

"This is charming!" she said. "But I am sufficiently tired to find my thoughts turning to the sleep awaiting me in my tent."

"Pleasant dreams," said Lloyd, stepping over to her with a smile. He held out his hand. Good-night and good-bye!"

"Do you really wish me to have pleasant dreams?" she asked, looking up into his face as she laid her hand in his.

"Can you doubt it?" he asked, with some surprise.

"Then don't go down into that quebrada tonight," she said; "else I shall certainly dream of you as falling down some terrible abyss from that fearful trail."

"Do you think it a habit of mine to fall over precipices?"

"No, no; but to go down—over that way we came up—at night! The mere thought of it makes me shudder. If you want me either to sleep or dream well, please promise that you will not do it."

"Very well, then—I promise that I will wait for daylight to make the descent. But that means that I shall leave here considerably before daylight. So—adieu!"

She did not echo the beautiful word; but, looking at him with a smile which had in it something a little mischievous, she answered, "Basta luego!" and then vanished into her tent.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE MOST DESIRABLE GOOD

The Mass is the most precious boon of the Church and of each of her members. In giving it to earth, God has made it the most magnificent gift and shown His love in the most striking manner.

How many even among those that make profession of loving Our Lord, very imperfectly appreciate this treasure of inestimable price!

And you yourself, do you esteem it, not at its just value—that is impossible—but as much as a true disciple of Christ can? Do you regard the Mass as the most desirable good that Jesus Christ has left to His Church and to souls? Do you believe with

the saints that a single Mass is of greater value than all the treasures of the world?

Do you sometimes think of thanking God for the incomparable present of His Heart? In practice, do you regard assistance at Mass as the first of your Christian obligations?

Are you practically convinced that prayers, the office, the chaplet, the prayers of devotion—that all the acts of virtue—the most heroic, even martyrdom itself—that all good works taken together are not equivalent to the Holy Sacrifice?—The Sentinel of The Blessed Sacrament.

LEAVING HIS MOTHER

Father Bonner turned from the window. He had been contemplating the landscape for some minutes, while the young man seated at the table in the center of the room waited impatiently. He looked up hopefully at the priest's approach, but his countenance fell, as Father Bonner said:

"You must wait, Danny, wait—"

"Oh, Father, I can't wait. Larry Heenehan is going and so are Jack Connor and Jimmy Guilfayle. Even Fatty Schneider has enlisted, and you tell me to wait, wait. I'll be the last! I'll be the last when I would have been the first if—Father, I can't do it! I'll have to go without—"

The words ended in a sigh that was almost a sob.

In his perplexity Father Bonner turned to the window again. What he saw did not help him. It was not at the familiar street he was looking, but at a picture that had been in his mind for some weeks past, ever since Danny Desmond had come to ask his advice about enlisting. He saw a little cottage, a tiny garden, a gray-haired mother, and Danny the youngest of eight and the only one of the flock left to her. Death had visited her often, trials and sorrows of one sort and another had been for many years her portion. Pence had now come to her and her last years were being passed contentedly. And if the grim god of war now took Danny? At seventy such partings are not easy. And yet was it wise to check the youth's enthusiasm, to hold back one so anxious for self-sacrifice? Father Bonner was troubled. He turned again to the young man.

"Give me another month, Danny, no longer, I promise you. Will you wait for a month?"

The young man did not answer, nor did he change his position as the priest laid his hand gently on his shoulder. His disappointment was so great that he dared not trust himself to speak. After a few moments of strained silence the boy (he was no more), took his hat, and went slowly from the house. Father Bonner watched him from the window as he swung down the walk and out the gate, and in spite of his years a thrill went through him as he thought of the young manhood of America, eager to serve their country in her hour of need. His heart went out to the man in Washington, on whose shoulders so great a burden rested and he longed to send him a message of cheer and tell him of the loyal legions anxious to do his bidding, to stand behind him even in death. From all parishes came the same story—the boys were going so rapidly that the women and girls could not sew the stars on the service flags fast enough. But while exulting in their bravery, Father Bonner saw further ahead. His heart filled with sorrow for the brave lads who would go down. "Will be Kelly and Burke and Shea, over again," he thought, sadly.

He was disturbed in his reverie, by the voice of his housekeeper adjuring him to come into supper. Ellen Coffey was a depot whom he dared not disobey, and as she served him, deftly and capably in spite of her sixty odd years, she plied him with questions and volunteered bits of information gathered through the day. For it must be admitted that Ellen loved gossip, and until she learned Danny Desmond's business Father Bonner would have little peace.

"Wanted to enlist, did he? Well, then, why didn't you let him? His mother? Oh, well, she could very well go to live with her daughter Katie. You mind her, don't you, Father? The red-haired one. She married Fitzgerald's son and they live over in Greenville. Yes, they have two or three, or maybe 'tis four children. What would one extra be, but just nothing at all. Besides, look at the help she'd be with the little one's."

Father had his desert by that time, and Ellen had the Desmond family affairs settled to her satisfaction, so he let her ramble on. When occupied with a problem like this she did not pester him about his appetite, nor watch to see if he ate what she deemed a proper amount for his health. She did not leave the dining room, however, until she had expressed herself freely on the subject of Danny's enlistment, and received Father Bonner's laughing assurance that in a month's time, if nothing turned up to prevent it, he would do all he could to help Danny along.

Left alone, the priest's thoughts again traveled to the sheltered little home of old Mrs. Desmond. Just how did she hope to solve the problem? Danny would go, he knew. He would require no permission from either the priest or his mother, yet he hoped a way might be found to make that mother see that she herself must send her son.

On the following Sunday, as he addressed the Married Ladies' Sodality, a suggestion came to him. He dwelt

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