

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER XIX.

"I HAVE BEEN CAST OF EDEN"

Into the life of Las Joyas a new element entered when Lloyd was borne senseless across its threshold. It was not only that he was the first of his race to be received there as a friend, since the one who had so basely betrayed the friendship he had found and the love he had won in this spot, but the circumstances surrounding his advent gave it a significance and influence which in their ultimate effect could hardly be exaggerated.

The first immediate effect was the conversion of Arturo Vallejo from an enemy into a friend. Those words of generous reassurance uttered by Lloyd as his mind struggled back to consciousness, not only won the gratitude of the young man, but his affection as well—an affection which he showed in his devotion of personal service that at times annoyed Victoria. For she was not inclined to delegate to any one her right of caring for the man who had incurred his injury as a direct result of service rendered to herself; and she impressed upon Arturo so frequently and so forcibly his responsibility for this injury, that Lloyd was at last driven to beg that the matter might be allowed to be forgotten.

"It was purely an accident," he urged; "and it is not right to make Don Arturo feel so badly about it." "It was no accident which made him deliberately waylay and quarrel with you," said Victoria. "Perhaps not; but it was a foolish, youthful impulse, of which he has thoroughly repented."

"It is right that he should repent," she said inflexibly. "But it is not right that you should continue to drive the occasion for repentance so remorselessly home," he answered, smiling. No great harm has been done. I have neither a broken head nor a dislocated neck—"

"It is no thanks to him that you have not."

"Very true indeed; but our acts must be judged by their intention, and he had no intention of causing either the one or the other. Besides, he is now my amigo."

"Is everyone at Las Joyas," said Victoria, gently.

Which was quite true. For Las Joyas soon discovered that he was entertaining, if not an angel unaware, at least an altogether unique gringo. Don Mariano, who had much experience with the species, declared this solemnly. With the usual type—men who possess no manners worth speaking of, who exhibit a rough contempt for all habits and standards which differ from their own, and who seek with a fierce intensity the precious metal which they hold at a value far transcending that of their own souls—he was familiar. It is a type very well known in Mexico, and considered to be representative of the genus *Americano*. But here was a man who was quiet, gentle, courteous as any Mexican, with a singular indifference toward everything, even the gold he had come so far to find. One and all of these people—so easily won by consideration, so bitterly resentful of rudeness and contempt—opened their hearts to him, and he speedily became "Don Felipe" to them, as to the woodcutters and miners and small rancheros all through the Sierra.

The only exception—in some degree at least—was Dona Beatriz. And it was not strange that Dona Beatriz could not open her heart as the others (even her passionate gringo-hating daughter) opened theirs to this gringo who had suddenly invaded her home in the irresistible strength of his weakness, and taken it by storm. She remembered how another had once entered there. And so subtle a thing is race that Lloyd's accent, voice, manner, constantly reminded her of Trafford; although it would have been difficult to find two individuals less alike. His presence revived memories which even after the lapse of long years had a torturing power. It awakened the old bitterness, the old passions, and drove her to kneel for hours on the hard brick of the chapel floor, praying for strength to overcome these terrible feelings and recollections. This being so, it was natural that she could give no more than gratitude and tolerance to the man who had indeed laid her under the obligation of service rendered, but whose presence recalled so much which she would gladly have given all the wealth of the Santa Cruz to forget.

And there was another reason, stronger yet, for shrinking from him. She had caught now and then a look on her daughter's face which made her ask herself if the old tragedy was, in any form to be repeated. It seemed incredible that it could be so; but life had taught Dona Beatriz with very convincing force that it is often the incredible as well as the unexpected, which happens. She said nothing to Victoria nor to any one else save God; but she carried about with her an abiding fear that the past would repeat itself; and that through association with this alien, her daughter, in one way or another, would be called to follow in her own steps along the *Via Dolorosa* of a broken heart.

It said much for her, and for the traditions under the influence of

which she had been reared, that these feelings and these fears never betrayed themselves in her manner. Toward Lloyd her gentle courtesy was unvarying; and on his side there was no one at Las Joyas for whom he felt such admiration and such deep respect as for this woman, with her noble presence and her eyes of haunting sweetness, who bore her wrongs with a dignity and reticence which a queen could not have surpassed. He had no suspicion of her fears with regard to himself; for nothing was further from his thoughts than that he could ever be suspected of playing the part, however modified, of Trafford; and he would have laughed to scorn the suggestion that Victoria could find anything attractive in one who (he would have said quite honestly) possessed no qualities to win a girl's fancy. They were simply good friends—Victoria and himself—he would have said. He knew that she was grateful to him; and that he was not interested in her from the pathos of her position, but he found a singular charm in her character and companionship. It was the charm which Isabel Rivers had discerned when she quoted Wordsworth's lines about her:

And here shall be the breathing balm,  
And here the silence and the calm  
Of mute, insensate things.

It was this "breathing balm" this "silence and calm," which Lloyd liked. Under these traits—far in hereditary characteristics of a race living for untold centuries close to Nature, amid the everlasting hills—he knew that there existed a depth of passion which could leap into fire, and a fund of energy which made her the dominating power on the hacienda and at the mine. But this energy, however resistless, was never feverish or restless. Generally speaking, people of much energy have no repose. They not only wear themselves out by the unceasing fret and turmoil in which they live, but they "get upon the nerves" of other to a degree which is very trying. Victoria never got upon any one's nerves. When not in immediate action, she was an embodiment of repose, to which her noble beauty lent itself as a vessel to the use for which it is perfectly fitted. Every movement, every gesture, expressed this repose; and when she spoke—she never chattered—the lovely Spanish words dropped from her lips like slow music.

One day she came out to Lloyd on the corridor which ran along the front of the house. Here had been placed for his benefit one of the couches peculiar to the Sierra—a wooden frame about two feet high, on which was tightly stretched the hide of a bull. Such a couch makes a Spartan bed; but sweet is the sleep which comes to the wanderer who rests on it, especially if he lies under the stars of heaven, in the forest-scented air. Stretched out now on the drum-like frame Lloyd was lying, his arms forming a pillow for his head, and his eyes fastened on the distant hills, in a state of dreamy ease of mind and body, when Victoria's shadow fell over him and he looked up at her with a smile.

"Well, Lady of Silence," he said, for neither her footfall nor her garments had made the least noise. "Have you come to share my *dolce far niente*?"

She smiled. The Italian term was new to her, but the beautiful sister tongues of Latin birth are so much alike that she had no difficulty in understanding it.

"Yes, if you wish," she answered and sat down on a chair near by. Then after a moment, added: "Do you find it sweet—this doing nothing?"

"Very," he replied concisely. "It is not usual with gringos—Americans to like to be idle, is it?" she asked. "I have heard that they are always in what you call a hurry."

He laughed at the familiar words on her lips. "There are Americans and Americans," he answered. "I come from the South, where life still flows in easy, reposeful fashion; and where the people have not yet learned—although I grieve to say the lesson is being taught very fast—that existence is given us merely to be spent in a mad, breathless, demoralizing chase after money."

"You are not chasing it, then?" she asked again, with interest. "Not very breathlessly, as you perceive. Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and I could never believe that it is well to spend that short time in laboriously gathering together a little wealth which must all be left behind when we go hence. There are, it seems to me, better and higher things to do with life's short golden hours."

"And that is why you like the Sierra?" "It is one reason. In the Sierra there is no sordid struggle of man with man for low and perishable ends; but there is the great majesty of Nature, which has power to uplift the mind and the soul to noble and eternal things." Then to himself he murmured:

"What now to me the jars of life,  
Is petty cares, its harder throes?  
The hills are free from toil and strife,  
And clasp me in their deep repose.  
"They soothe the pain within my breast  
No power but theirs can ever reach;  
They emblem that eternal rest  
We can not compass in our speech."

Victoria regarded him curiously. "What are you saying?" she inquired. "I do not understand English."

"I was merely quoting some fragments of verse which have lain in my memory a long time," he explained. "They express better than I can the charm which the Sierra holds for me. When I am among the great hills and the deep woods, I feel that there is a healing process going on within me, as if balm were being poured into all my wounds."

"Have you many?" asked Victoria, with the directness to which he had by this time grown accustomed. "Who has not?" he asked in turn, evasively. And then, more from desire to change the subject than from curiosity, he added, glancing at her hand: "But what have you brought with you? It looks like a letter."

It is a letter—from the senorita of the Caridad. What is it you call her—Miss Rivers?" "You would call her Dona Isabel," said Lloyd, lifting himself up to take the letter which she extended to him. It was indeed from Miss Rivers, stating that she would leave Topia for Las Joyas on the next—no, on the present day. Lloyd stared for a minute or two at the graceful writing on the pale gray paper, as if he found it hard to decipher. Then he looked up.

"You lost no time in following my suggestion about asking her to visit you?" Victoria returned. "I could not do anything to please you too soon."

"You are very good—much too good," he answered; but—er—there was really no question of pleasing me in this matter. I am glad that Miss Rivers is coming; I know you will like her; but it chances that I must leave Las Joyas tomorrow."

"Leave—tomorrow?" Victoria was aghast. "It is impossible. You are not able to go." "Oh, yes, I am thoroughly able! Nothing but your kindness and my own indolence has kept me here for a week past."

"I am sure that your head is not 'all right' yet," she said, using the English expression which she had caught from him. He gave the head in question a shake, as if to test its condition. "It feels as right as I have any reason to hope that it ever will," he assured her.

"Not as well as it did before your accident?" "Yes, quite as well, I think."

There was a pause, during which Victoria regarded him with the intentness which characterized her. He was conscious of the steady observation of the dark eyes, but he did not meet them. Sitting on the side of the couch, he drew a pipe from his pocket and began to charge it with "short cut," which required to be pressed down in the bowl with great care and attention.

"I do not understand why you should go away as soon as you hear that the senorita is coming," Victoria said at length. "I thought you liked her." "So I do—very much," Lloyd replied quickly; "and I regret not to have the pleasure of seeing her. But I was due at San Andres ten days ago, and I must really go tomorrow."

"I am sorry that I asked her to come, if her coming is to be the cause of your leaving," Victoria went on. "But why should you think it the cause?" Lloyd asked. "On the contrary, I have business at San Andres."

Victoria waved the business aside with an imperious gesture. "You had not thought of going before you read that letter," she said with positiveness. "And I do not see why the senorita should drive you away."

"She is not driving me away," Lloyd interposed, with what he felt to be perfectly futile protest. "Unless you dislike her—" Victoria proceeded.

"I assure you that I like and admire her extremely," he now interposed eagerly. "Or you are in love with her," Victoria ended calmly. "I—I—in love with her!" Lloyd was vexed to feel the blood mount in a tide to the roots of his hair, so entirely was he unprepared for this. "Why should you think anything so absurd?" he demanded almost angrily.

Victoria continued to regard him for a moment longer, and then she looked away—out over the green valley to the steadfast heights. "I have seen it in your face and heard it in your voice, when you spoke of her," she answered cutely. "There was again a silence, in which it was Lloyd's turn to stare at the speaker. He knew well this power of reading the primitive emotions which children, savages, the unlearned, and some persons who share the traits of these—their simplicity of character and feeling—possess. He felt that to argue against such divination, however much it overlapped the actual truth, was useless; and, moreover, a sudden idea, a sudden flash struck him with a sharp shock. What expression it was on the face somewhat turned from him which suggested this idea, this feat, it is impossible to say; but under a compelling impulse he spoke very gravely:

"Why not?" she asked peremptorily. "Because, for one thing, the power of it has been burned out of me," he answered. "I will speak to you very frankly, because I think—I am sure—we are friends."

"Her eyes met his with a gaze full, frank, direct." "Yes," she said, "we are certainly friends."

"And friends should know the truth about each other, so as to avoid mistakes like this you have made in thinking—"

"In feeling," she said, as if to herself. "That it is possible for me to fall in love with any one." He paused a moment. It was evidently hard for him to go on. "I would rather not tell you what happened to me long ago. But it was an experience which has made me an exile from my home for years, and which has also made it impossible for me ever to make another home for myself. So I have wandered here and there—a lonely and unhappy man—until I came into the Sierra, and the Sierra gave me peace."

"I know that you had suffered," said Victoria. "I have thought: 'Perhaps he has lost that which he loves best.'"

"There is a sorrow deeper than losing, I said, with stern bitterness. It is learning that one never had anything worth losing; it is learning that there is nothing in the world worth striving for, and nothing that gives any satisfaction after one possesses it. That is a sickness of the soul which not even the Sierra can heal. But I do not want to talk of myself," he added quickly and impatiently. "I only want to make you comprehend that the things called love and happiness are not for me. They lie far behind me. I have been cast out of Eden long since, and there is no flaming sword necessary to warn me from its gates; I would not enter them again if I could. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is too bitter."

Victoria leaned toward him with the almost divine pity, which women are quick to feel for wounds such as these, shining in her eyes. "It feels as if I could help you!" she said in a low tone. "Low as it was, there was a passion in which started Lloyd.

"No one," he answered, with the sternness which had been in his voice before, "can help a man who has ruined his own life. I have done that, so waste no compassion on me. And don't think that I complain; I only want you to understand."

"I think I understand," she said. Her glance turned again toward the great hills, the deep, compact, living woods. "I am glad the Sierra has given you peace," she said softly. "Some day it may give you happiness as well."

"If so," he answered—and his gaze turned also, with something of longing, toward the mountains and the forest—"it will only be, I think, in the form of the deepest peace which can come to man."

TO BE CONTINUED

"DEMPS" A TRUE STORY BY R. J. MURDOCK IN ROSARY MAGAZINE

We were seated in a little low hut, built of sand-bags and corrugated iron that had no floor other than the natural earth covered in two or three places with old canvas tar sacks. A large empty five-gallon creosote tin laid horizontally on a foundation of brick and dried mud, with a piece of pipe joined to it and running up through the low roof, made a very serviceable stove. A fire of charcoal and small pieces of wood burned in it now, and as there was no door to open or shut, the fire glowed through the opening of the tin which we sat facing. In one corner of the hut a small carbon lamp stood on an upturned biscuit box and gave a bright steady light. Different pieces of military equipment and small khaki medical bags with red crosses on them hung from pegs or nails driven into the bags of sand. Near one wall lay a number of folded military stretchers. It was the hut of the stretcher-bearers, and I had stepped in out of the rain to visit them.

No one had spoken for a few minutes and it was rather quiet in the little hut, save for the faint tinkle of the rain on the corrugated iron roof, though at intervals from many siege batteries not far distant came the thunder of our guns. Suddenly an extra loud roar of a No. 12 made the earth tremble and extinguished the flame of the lamp. Simultaneously, shadows of different objects in the hut appeared on the darkened walls in the dim red glow of the fire. One of the stretcher-bearers stood up quickly, tore a strip from a newspaper that had come in the mail, touched it to the fire and carried it, flaming to the little lamp and lit it. And as he did so I noticed, lying on the upturned biscuit box, a rather unusual looking crucifix. The cross was of split sapling, unpainted, from which the bark had been removed; at certain intervals there were little protrusions from the wood which resembled the thorns of a rosebush. The figure was of oxidized silver, beautifully moulded, and on the face of the crucified Christ there was a look of intense appeal and sorrow. The lad, as he squeezed out the lighted paper in his closed fist, noticed me looking towards it. A

moment later he passed it to me in silence. I examined it for a few seconds, without making any comment. Then as I returned it to him he spoke.

"It belongs to Demps," he said; "he found it up around St. Pierre. He uses't to work much at his religion, but he's doing much better lately."

I was very glad to infer that Demps had become a little more religious, for I knew him well and I was aware that he caused his chaplain more anxiety than any other person in the section. He had followed up attack after attack, seeking the wounded to bear them away to safety, and not once had he received the sacraments before going into the danger zone. No wonder that he was a source of constant worry to young Father Hall, who had charge of all the Catholics of the brigade to which the Ambulance section was attached.

But every one that knew Demps liked him. Tall, slight, blue-eyed and rather dark looking, he was of a whimsical turn of mind, and was quick to see the humorous side of an incident; that is, if it so happened that there was a humorous side.

The name that he gave the recruiting officer was Charles Arthur Dempsy and there is no reason to believe that this was not his real name. In time, however, his comrades re-christened him "Demps," and every one called him Demps, even the medical officer. He was not long in the Ambulance section before he became a general favorite, and whenever the name of Demps was mentioned, his comrades smiled pleasantly, but to the face of Father Hall, two little lines came above the nose and a worried expression looked out from his eyes.

It seemed strange that such a genial, pleasant lad should be so lax in the observance of his religious duties. He was thoughtful, however, for one night after Father Hall had heard over one hundred confessions, one called him Demps, even the medical officer. He was not long in the Ambulance section before he became a general favorite, and whenever the name of Demps was mentioned, his comrades smiled pleasantly, but to the face of Father Hall, two little lines came above the nose and a worried expression looked out from his eyes.

When they found the wounded soldier, a glance was enough to tell these lads, so experienced in the school of war, that the man was dying. And as they placed him gently yet quickly on the stretcher and raised it shoulder high, he began to call out: "A holy Roman Catholic priest!" "A holy Roman Catholic priest!" The other three stretcher-bearers looked at Demps, who was carrying head, inclined slightly and told the lad that the priest was waiting for him at the dressing station. He was quiet for a while, then as the bearers stopped to rest for a few seconds he began to call again: "A holy Roman Catholic priest!" "A holy Roman Catholic priest!" "A holy Roman Catholic priest!" It was just here, while they rested, that Demps found the crucifix lying intact among a pile of debris. He picked it up and passed it to the wounded lad, who, holding it tight to his breast, remained quiet till they reached the dressing-station. But as soon as he reached it he asked the first officer he met, who happened to be the doctor, if he were a "holy Roman Catholic priest."

The doctor beckoned to Father Hall. "Are you a holy Roman Catholic priest?" asked the boy. "Well," said the good priest, "I can't speak for the holy part of it, lad, but I think I'm the person you are looking for. I am a priest."

"Oh," he cried, "I'm so grateful! Will you please baptize me, Father? I want to die a Roman Catholic."

The priest looked at the wounded lad and asked him if he knew anything about the Catholic Church. "No, not a great deal, Father, but I believe everything that you believe and I know it is the true Church."

The priest asked him a question or two and explained briefly the principal mysteries of religion. Then there in the little concrete cellar he was baptized, and Demps stood sponsor.

Father Hall was called away, but Demps—whose relief had come—remained holding the crucifix that he had found to the lad's lips and praying with him.

When he had passed away peacefully, his soul filled with the sweet grace of the regenerating waters, Demps continued to kneel, the crucifix still in his hands. Then he beckoned to Father Hall, who had returned, and when the priest had slipped the little purple stole over his shoulders and seated himself upon an upturned box, Demps reverently went to confession.

As Father Hall walked up and down that night in the little concrete cellar saying his beads, every once in a while he would stop. Perhaps he was thinking of the soul that had been cleansed and had gone forth heir to the Kingdom of Heaven; perhaps he was thinking of Demps, but if he was, there was no worried look on his face, for Father Hall was very happy—and there was joy among the angels.

UNFOUNDED CHARGES

ACCUSATIONS RAISED AGAINST "CHURCHES" DO NOT APPLY TO CATHOLIC CHURCH

When the Great War began there were many who spoke of the bankruptcy of Christianity and the churches. Now that the war has come to an end, the same cry is raised in a different version. In the face of the reconstruction problems which we must meet, Harry Emerson Fosdick, in the "Atlantic Monthly" (January issue) repeats the implication of the previous inefficiency of the churches in a lengthy article, and demands that the leaders of religion must cease "making men suspicious that religion is nothing more than a bribe for protection by a benevolent God!" Christianity, the churches, should do more than this, he says, thus taking for granted that the churches have not pursued anything more positive or constructive than a merely negative policy of cajoling the public into membership in a quasi soul-insurance association.

And the "New Republic" in a recent editorial ("The Greatest of These") boldly accuses the churches of having done nothing "before or during the war," to "diminish the social bankruptcy." They are charged with having "permitted the subordination of religious to political authority . . ." and with having "consented to the secularization of all human activities."

These accusations are unjust, even as applied to the non-Catholic churches, and as for the Catholic Church, we deny them flatly. But even if we concede that an awakening of "the churches" to the duties of their broader religious and social mission might be necessary, yet they should not unqualifiedly be held responsible for inaction or inefficient action when the sources and causes of their seeming dereliction can be so easily discerned. Many who now assail the churches are "de facto" opponents of their spiritual work; they have permitted or even encouraged their "secularization." Instead of being the religious center, many churches have been made the "social center" in the conventional sense, not in the socio-economic sense; and the policies of the ministers and of their congregated bodies have been dragged down by the secular thoughts and wishes of the congregations; many of those who patronize the churches and profess membership in them are but the eager pupils of masters who have been endeavoring for centuries to cripple the churches,—and primarily the Church—to neutralize their influence, to relegate them to the rank of

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