

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

Published by permission of the B. Harder Book Co., St. Louis, Mo.

CHAPTER XIII INTO THE SIERRA

Why the deuce you should be in such a hurry to get away, Lloyd I don't understand."

It was Armistead who spoke, in no very amiable tone, as he sat on the side of his hard, narrow bed in the room the two men occupied together, and watched Lloyd's preparations for departure.

"If you don't understand, it's not because I haven't told you why I'm going," Lloyd replied, rolling up, with the deftness of long practice, a few necessary articles on the *serape* which was to be carried behind his saddle. "I have nothing to do here; and, not being fond of idleness, I am going out to Urbeleja to look after some prospects."

"There might be a good deal for you to do here, if you were not so confidently disbelieving, and would do it."

"As for example—?"

"To assist me in getting possession of the Santa Cruz Mine."

"I've told you that I can not possibly assist you in that matter. I made that plain to you before we left San Francisco."

"I didn't believe you would really be such a—um—er—"

"Don't hesitate to use the term you consider applicable. I am not thin-skinned and can stand it."

"Well, you must acknowledge that no sensible man would act as you are doing."

"According to your definition of a sensible man, probably not."

"And I consider that you are treating me very badly besides."

"You haven't the faintest right to think so, in view of our positive understanding; but if you do, the remedy is simple—we'll shake hands now and go our different ways."

"And how about those prospects in the Sierra?"

Lloyd shrugged his shoulders as he pulled the straps of his roll tighter.

"The prospects will remain prospects," he said; "at least I shall not expect you to sell them."

Armistead frowned as he looked at the other.

"You are without exception the most pig-headed and impracticable man I have ever known," he said.

"You are ready to throw up a fortune, if half what you say of those prospects is true, rather than help me in a matter that does not concern you in the least."

"It concerns me to hold fast to my own standards of conduct. I don't impose them on any one else, but they are essential to my self-respect."

"Oh, hang your self-respect," Armistead rose, moved impatiently across the room, then turned sharply around. "When are you coming back to Topia?" he asked.

"I don't expect to return to Topia," Lloyd answered. "I have no business here. From Urbeleja I shall go to San Andres."

"Well, of all—!" Words failed Armistead for a moment, as he stood with his hands in his pockets staring at the other. "Haven't you business with me? I am not going to give you those mines because you are a quick-witted idler."

"In that case you can meet me at San Andres, where I must go to see about the titles. I will let you know when I reach there, and you have nothing to keep you here."

"You are mistaken; I have a great deal to keep me here. To get possession of the Santa Cruz Mine is my first business in the country, and I find this is the best place from which to direct operations. Then, since you have failed me, I must depend on the Caridad people for help in certain matters. By the by, are you going away without bidding Mr. and Miss Rivers farewell?"

"Certainly not. I shall call to see them as I leave town. And now—glancing quickly round—I believe I am ready for the road. Good-bye, old man! I'm sorry I can't wish you success in the Santa Cruz matter, but I hope you'll come to no personal harm over it."

Armistead lifted his brows.

"To what personal harm could I possibly come?" he asked. "Good-bye. Look out for yourself in that fearful Sierra!"

"Oh, the Sierra and I are old friends!" Lloyd laughed, as he went out to where his horse waited for him.

In the saddle and riding up the street, the stimulating freshness of the morning, with its diamond-like air and brilliant sunshine, seemed to brace both body and spirit like a tonic. And so it was a clear-eyed, self-contained man, with mouth and chin resolutely set, who presently rode with the ease of old familiarity into the patio of the Caridad house, and uncovered at sight of Miss Rivers, who was basking in the sunshine on the corridor.

"O, Mr. Lloyd," she cried, looking up as his horse's feet rang on the pavement. "How delighted I am to see you! Oddly enough—and yet not oddly at all—I was just thinking of you."

"Not anything ill, I hope?" he said, as he dismounted and went toward her; thinking, when he met the smile on her lips and in her eyes, what a face to match the morning sunshine here was.

"Not unless it were for slipping away so mysteriously at the San Benito the other evening and not coming near us since," she answered.

"I was just wondering if I should have to send and compel you to come and be thanked for the beautiful sketch of the quebrada you have sent me."

"I am glad if it is what you wanted. It did not satisfy me at all."

"One always finds it difficult to be satisfied with one's work, does one not? I can account in no other way for your not being satisfied with this. You must pardon me for saying that it seems to me much better done than any of your other sketches, of which Mr. Thornton has shown me a good many."

"Has Thornton kept those fragments? Well, if this is much better, it must have been with me as with old Picot, the French carpenter; you put a spirit into us to make us do our best for you."

She looked at him for a moment in silence before she said:

"I should like to put a spirit into you to make you do your best for yourself."

"I am sure you would," he answered, smiling at her—they had by this time sat down in two large chairs facing each other. "I have never seen any one who evidently possessed more strongly the desire of helping lame dogs over stilets. But, you see, sometimes the dog is ungrateful."

"You are not that, I am sure, Mr. Lloyd."

"And sometimes he is incapable of profiting by the assistance of the kind hand held out to him. That is my case. The time has gone by when I could care to do anything for myself. It is long since I have even particularly cared about making money, which is understood to be the first duty of an American. But I am going to mend my habits in that particular, at least. I am now on my way into the Sierra to take up some prospects."

"You are on your way into the Sierra? He glanced at his horse and then across the valley at the eastern heights, where a trail wound upward like a thread to the pass between the crowning cliffs. "I wish I were going with you."

"Needless to say that I wish so, too."

"That is more polite than true, I'm afraid. But I am determined to go some day. I shall make papa take me."

"You are going to see Dona Victoria some day, you know."

"I hope so; but—she leaned suddenly and eagerly forward—"are you going to see Dona Victoria now, Mr. Lloyd? Oh, you don't know how much I have been thinking, wondering how you would contrive to warn her!"

"This seems the only way," he said. "I would prefer I am not going to see Dona Victoria. I shall simply call at the mine and warn Don Mariano to be on his guard against possible surprise."

"How good, how very good of you to undertake such an errand!"

"Don't give me more credit than I deserve. I am going to Urbeleja, as I told you, about some prospects; and to call at the Santa Cruz will not take me very much out of my way."

"I must believe you, I suppose; but I have my suspicions that the prospects come in very conveniently just now. And if you see Dona Victoria—"

"May I tell her that she owes the warning to you?"

"I would prefer that she did not. I could not give the warning without betraying confidence, you know. As it is, my conscience is not at all easy about the matter."

"It should be, then," said Lloyd, stoutly. "You have told me nothing; in fact, I know nothing of Armistead's plans. I only suspect what his course of action will be; and I shall merely, in a general way, offer some advice to Don Mariano, which he may or may not heed."

"Will he not think that you are taking a liberty, and perhaps resent it, if you put the matter that way?"

"Possibly; but that is strictly his affair."

"No, no; it is our affair also; for we are thinking of Dona Victoria and her mother, and we don't want them to lose their mine. Take my advice, Mr. Lloyd—perhaps I ought not to give it, but I will,—and make your warning emphatic. Let Don Mariano understand that it rests on knowledge."

"But Don Mariano would be quite justified in wondering why I should betray the confidence of my friend for the sake of strangers. That is how it would look to him, you see."

"Yes, I see. It's rather a difficult matter, isn't it?"

"Very," said Lloyd, a little dryly; "so difficult that the part of wisdom, if not altruism, would seem to be to stand apart and let the opposing forces fight it out alone."

"Oh, but I can't—I really can't!" said Miss Rivers, distressed. "When I think of that poor man in San Francisco and those poor women in the Sierra, I feel that I must take part in the fight, if I have to go and warn Dona Victoria myself."

"You couldn't possibly do that; but it might, perhaps, help matters if you were to give me a credential."

"Well, the form of a line or two to Dona Victoria, asking her to heed any warning I may give."

"Do you think she would heed that?"

"I am inclined to think so. I know that you won her liking and trust during your journey up the quebrada."

"I am very glad to hear it. Tell me, then, exactly what you want me to say."

"Something like this, I think: that you feel deep interest and sympathy in her struggle for her rights, and that you hope she will give attention to any advice I may offer her."

Miss Rivers rose eagerly.

"Come into the sala and help me write it," she said. "My Spanish is not faultless, and after 'Muy apreciable Senorita' I should be at a loss how to proceed."

Lloyd followed her willingly enough into the room she had made so pretty and homelike. He was not sorry to carry away a picture of her as she sat at the desk beside the window and wrote her note, with the light falling on the softly piled masses of her golden-brown hair and the gracious curves of her fair cheek. The few lines which he dictated were, however, soon written, the pale gray sheet, with its stamped monogram and faint violet fragrance, was put into an envelope, addressed to the Senorita Dona Calderon, and handed to him. And then it was time to go. He rose to his feet, slipping the note into an inner pocket; and as he did so his glance fell on his own sketch of the quebrada, which was placed above the desk. Isabel's glance followed his.

"You see I have it there," she said, "not only to admire, but to remember how near I was to being carried down into those dark depths. That is why I wanted the shadows of evening—the impression of awe; and you have given it so well. I can never look at it without thinking of the moment you enticed me away and the boulder crashed past us, brushing my dress as it went."

He could not resist the temptation to say:

"I am glad you have it, then; for I shall know that you remember me sometimes, if I should not have the pleasure of meeting you again."

She looked surprised.

"But surely you are not going to stay in the Sierra," she exclaimed.

"You will be back soon?"

"Not very soon, I fear; and it can not be that Topia will keep you very long."

"You are as bad as papa. Topia will keep me for a long time yet; and, besides, I am going out into the Sierra. What is to prevent our meeting there?"

"Nothing, except that the Sierra is very wild, and, like the sad-hearted Moor of Le Golondrina,"

"Voy a partir a lejanas regiones."

"Well, I am going into the 'lejanas regiones' also," she said, nodding determinedly. "Some day when you have climbed a high mountain, you will find that I have been coming up the other side. We shall meet on the top. You will say: 'What! you here! And I will answer: 'I told you I would come!'"

"Hasten the day!" said he, smiling.

"I shall look for you now on the top of every mountain I climb."

"I am sure we shall meet," she said confidently; "but meanwhile I hope you will come back and tell me how you have fared with Dona Victoria. I trust she will heed your warning."

"So do I, for her own sake. And now—let me hold out his hand—"good-bye! I suppose I will find Mr. Rivers in the office?"

"If he is not at the mine. Good-bye!" She laid her hand in his.

"And—what is it they say here?—Yaya Vd. con Dios!"

"Go with God!" The beautiful parting words still rang in his ears after he had climbed the steep heights and paused an instant at the summit of the pass for a last look at Topia, lying in its green valley three thousand feet below; and then rode onward into the fair, wild, sylvan ways of the great Sierra.

CHAPTER XIV. AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

On the day after Lloyd's departure from Topia, Armistead, in fulfillment of his expressed intention to obtain the assistance he needed from "the Caridad people," paid a visit to Mr. Rivers and formally asked this assistance. The Gerente of the Caridad leaned back in his chair and looked grave.

"Well, you see, Armistead," he said, "with every disposition to oblige you personally, it is rather a delicate matter for us to touch. We are living and doing business in this country, and we can not afford to antagonize the feeling of the people. Now, I suppose I don't need to tell you that there's a pretty strong feeling about this Santa Cruz matter."

Armistead shrugged his shoulders. "That is to be counted on of course, where the claim of an alien and one against—or women is concerned," he replied.

"Rather more than simply against women" in this case, you know, my dear fellow," Mr. Rivers suggested.

"I understand perfectly that it wouldn't do for you to give open assistance, and I am not asking anything of the kind," Armistead went on; "but I am left in rather a difficult position by Lloyd's defection. He has such scruples, or such fears for himself, in the matter that he has refused to give me the help I need in getting together a force of reliable men to take possession of the mine; for I'm sure you'll agree with me that that is the best and quickest way to end the matter."

Mr. Rivers picked up a ruler and tapped meditatively on the desk before which he sat—for this conversation took place in the office of the Caridad.

"Perhaps so," he said guardedly. "It is a point on which I hardly feel

qualified to give an opinion. It's a peculiar situation,—very peculiar; and there are—er—many things to take into consideration. I would like to oblige you in any way possible, Armistead; but I really don't think it possible for us to take any part in the business."

"My dear sir," replied Armistead earnestly, "I don't ask you to take part in it further than to recommend some men for my purpose."

"But that's impossible, don't you see?—because the only men for whom I could speak are the men in our employ, and it would never do for any man connected with the Caridad to be concerned in this matter."

"In short," said Armistead, stiffly, "it seems that I can not count on any friendly services from the Caridad. It's not exactly what I looked for—to have the cold shoulder turned to me by the representatives of an American company."

"I think that we have proved that there is no cold shoulder turned to you personally," Mr. Rivers answered; "and if your business here were of an ordinary character, the Caridad indeed would be glad to be of help to you. But you must recognize that that what you are engaged in is not an ordinary business, but is one in which so much feeling is arrayed against your claim, that I should seriously injure my company with the people if I lent you any assistance. You could not expect me to do that even if my own sympathy were with you—that is, with Trafford—in the contest; and, frankly, it is not."

Armistead rose to his feet, more angry than he wished to express.

"I see that I have nothing to expect in the way of help here," he said, "so with apologies for having troubled you, I'll bid you good-day."

Mr. Rivers rose also, and laid his hand upon the other's arm.

"Be reasonable, Armistead!" he urged. "You are a man of the world and you certainly must know that Trafford's conduct in this matter is inexcusable. We all like you but we can't possibly let our personal liking lead us into lending our hands to as dastardly a business as any man again I am speaking of Trafford—ever engaged in. But don't go off offended. Come into the house and see Isabel."

If Armistead had been capable still then of smiling, he might have smiled at the tone of the last words. "Come into the house and see Isabel," Mr. Rivers said, much as he might have offered a sugar-plum to an angry child; and with an absolute confidence too in the efficacy of the sugar-plum. But Armistead's feeling here too much refused to allow of his accepting the invitation. He curtly declined to pass into the patio, toward which Mr. Rivers' gesture invited him; and, turning his back on its possible seductions, walked out of the front door into the landing—or, rather, into the road which became presently the main street of Topia.

Before he reached the first houses of the village, however, he met Thornton, who, followed by a *mozo* with a bag of coin carried on his shoulder as if it were a bag of grain, was on his way to the office; for this was pay-day at the Caridad, and on such days the merchants of Topia were frequently called upon to give up all their silver in exchange for drafts on Callican and Durango. They were very willing to do so, since the drafts of the mine supplied an exchange which there was no bank to supply; and since the coin with which they parted quickly found its way back through the hand of the miners, into their tills.

"Hello!" said Thornton, as he met the man swinging at such a rapid pace down the road. "The express isn't due for five minutes yet. Dreaming, weren't you?" he added with a laugh as Armistead paused. Thought you were in the Land of Hurry again, I suppose, with a transaction of a million or so to be settled in five minutes over the telephone. See how much better we do business here!" And he waved his hand toward the *mozo*, who halted patiently with the heavy bag of coin on his bent shoulders.

"Send that fellow on! I want to talk to you," said Armistead, impatiently.

"Go on to the office, Dionisio, and tell the Gerente that I will be there in five minutes," said Thornton.

So he went, leaving Armistead to his own thoughts. "He'll not be surprised if he doesn't see me for half an hour," the speaker added as the *mozo* went on. "Such are the blessings of being in what scoffers call the Land of Manana. And now what can I do for you?"

"A great deal, if you like," Armistead answered. "In the first place, what will you take to sever your connection with the Caridad and enter into my employ?"

Thornton stared for an instant.

"You aren't in earnest?" he said.

"Do you suppose I ever jest on business?" Armistead demanded. "You have been so long in this wretched country that you've forgotten how men do business—at home. Of course I'm in earnest, and to prove it I'll make a definite offer. If you come to me I'll double whatever salary you are getting from the Caridad company, for as long a time as we remain in Mexico; and I'll take you to California with me when I go and find you a good position there. How does that strike you?"

"Rather overwhelmingly," Thornton replied. "In fact, the effect is so great on a system which, as you remark, is somewhat debilitated by the methods of business of this country, that I—I think I'll sit down."

He sank as he spoke, with an air of one quite overwhelmed, on the spreading roots of a large tree by the side of the road; and Armistead,

frowning at this misplaced levity, followed his example.

"Don't be more of an idiot than you are," he said, with the frank insolence of an old chumsmate. "This isn't a time for jesting. I want a man."

"I thought you had one. What has become of Lloyd?"

"He has gone off into the Sierra."

"But isn't he coming back?"

"Not to help me in the business I am here specially to transact."

"And that is—?"

"To get hold of the Santa Cruz Mine. You must know—it appears that everybody knows that."

"Ah! Thornton looked meditatively at the great heights towering before them. And why will not Lloyd help you in the matter?"

"For some private reason of his own—probably he is afraid."

Thornton shook his head.

TO BE CONTINUED

BUCKS, DESPATCHER

By Frank H. Spearman

"I see a good deal of stuff in print about the engineer," said Callahan, dejectedly. "What's the matter with the despatcher? What's the matter with the man who tells the engineer what to do—and just what to do? How to do it—and exactly how to do it? With the man who sits shut in brick walls and hung in Chinese puzzles, his ear glued to a receiver, and his finger fast to a key, and his eye riveted on a train chart? The man who orders and annuls and stops and starts everything within five hundred miles of him, and holds under his thumb more lives every minute than a brigadier does in a lifetime? For instance," asked Callahan in that tired way of his, "What's the matter with Bucks?"

Now, I myself never knew Bucks. He left the West End before I went on. Bucks is second vice-president—which means the boss—of a transcontinental line now, and a great swell. But no man from the West End that calls on Bucks has to wait for an audience, though bigger men do. They talk of him out there yet. Not of General Superintendent Bucks, which he came to be, nor of General Manager Bucks. On the West End he is just plain Bucks; but Bucks on the West End means a whole lot.

"He saved the company just \$800,000 that night the Ogallala train ran away," mused Callahan. Callahan himself is assistant superintendent, and by all accounts soon will be superintendent.

"It is a good deal of money—\$800,000—Callahan, I objected.

"Figure it yourself. To begin with, fifty passengers' lives—that's \$5,000 apiece, isn't it?" Callahan had a cold-blooded way of figuring a passenger's life from the company standpoint. "It would have killed over fifty passengers if the runaway had ever struck 59, and there wouldn't have been enough left to make a decent funeral. Then the equipment, at least \$50,000. But there was a whole lot more than \$300,000 in it for Bucks."

"How so?"

"He told me once that if he hadn't saved 59 that night he would never have signed another order anywhere on any road."

"Why?" I asked, a little bit surprised.

"Why?" Because, after it was all over he found out that his own mother was aboard 59. Didn't you ever hear that? I thought that by this time everybody had heard of that incident. Well, sir, it was Christmas Eve, and the year was 1884. Christmas Eve everywhere but on the West End; there it was no different from any other day—just plain Dec. 24th.

"High winds will prevail for ensuing twenty-four hours. Station agents will use extra care to secure cars on sidings; brakemen must use care to avoid being blown from trains."

That was about all Bucks said in his bulletins that evening; not a word about Christmas nor Merry Christmas. In fact, if Christmas had come to McCloud that night they couldn't have held it twenty-four hours; the wind was too high. All the week, all the day it had blown—a December wind: dry as an August noon, bitter as powdered ice. It was in the days of our western railroad-when we had only one fast train on the schedule—the St. Louis California Express; and only one fast engine on the division—the 101; and only one man on the whole West End—Bucks.

Bucks was assistant superintendent, and master mechanic, and train master, and chief despatcher, and store keeper—and a bully good fellow. There were some boys in the service; among them, Callahan. Callahan was seventeen, with hair like a sunset, and a mind quick as an airbrake. It was his first year at the key, and he had a night trick under Bucks.

Callahan claims it blew so hard that night that it blew most of the color out of his hair. Horses and cattle huddled into friendly pockets a little out of the worst of it, or froze mutely in pitiless fence corners on the divide. Sand drove griding down from the Cheyenne hills like a storm of snow. The streets of the raw prairie towns stared deserted at the sky. Even the cowboys kept their ranches, and through the gloom of noon the sun cast a coward shadow. It was a wretched day, and the sun went down with the wind turning into a gale, and all the boys in bad humor—except Bucks. Not

that Bucks couldn't get mad; but it took more than a cyclone to start him.

No. 59, the California Express, was late that night. All the way up the valley the wind caught her quartering. Really the marvel is that out there on the plains such storms didn't blow our toy engines clear off the rails; for that matter they might as well have taken the rails, too, for none of them weighed over sixty pounds. Fifty-nine was due at 11 o'clock; it was 12:30 when she pulled in, and on Callahan's track. But Bucks hung around until she staggered up under the streaked moonlight, as frowy a looking train as ever choked on alkali.

There was always a crowd down at the station to meet 59. But it was not so that night. The platform was bare. Not even the hardy chief of police ventured out.

The engineer swung out of his cab with the silence of an abused man. His eyes were full of soda, his ears full of sand, his mustache full of burrs and his whiskers full of tumble-weeds. The conductor and the brakemen climbed sullenly down, and the baggage man shoved open his door and slammed a trunk out on the platform without a pretense of sympathy. Then the outgoing crew climbed aboard, and in a hurry. The conductor elect ran downstairs from the register and pulled his cap down hard before he pushed ahead against the wind to give the engineer his copy of the orders as the new engine was coupled up. The fireman pulled the canvas jealously across the narrow gangway between tank and engine. The brakeman ran hurriedly back to examine the air connections, and gave his signal to the conductor; the conductor gave his to the engineer. There were two short snorts from the 101, and 59 moved out stealthily, evenly, resistlessly into the teeth of the night. In a minute, only her red lamps gleamed up the yard. One man still on the station platform watched them recede; it was Bucks.

He came up to the despatcher's office and sat down. Callahan wondered why he didn't go home and to bed; but Callahan was too good a railroad man to ask questions of a superior. Bucks might have stood on his head on the stove, and it red hot, without being pursued with inquiries from Callahan.

"I kind of looked for my mother tonight," said he, after Callahan got his orders out of the way for a minute.

"Where does your mother live?"

"Chicago. I sent her transportation two weeks ago. Reckon she thought she'd better stay home for Christmas. Back in God's country they have Christmas just about this time of year. Watch out tonight, Jim, I'm going home. It's a tail wind."

Callahan was making a meeting-point for two freights when the door closed behind Bucks; he didn't even say "Good night," and, as for Merry Christmas—well, that had no place on the West End anyhow.

"D-I, D-I, D-I, D-I," came clicking into the room. Callahan wasn't asleep. Once he did sleep. When he told Bucks, he made sure of his time, only he thought Bucks ought to know.

Bucks shook his head pretty hard that time. "It's awful business, Jim. It's murder, you know. It's the penitentiary, if they should convict you. But it's worse than that. If anything happened because you went to sleep over the key, you'd have them on your mind all your life, don't you know—forever. Men—and—children. That's what I always think about—the children. Maimed and scalded and burned. Jim, if it ever happens again, quit despatching; get into commercial work; mistakes don't cost life there; don't try to handle trains. If it ever happens with you, you'll kill yourself."

That was all he said. No wonder Callahan loved him.

</