

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER IX

IN THE PATIO OF THE CARIDAD

The village of Topia lies far and high in the Sierra, occupying a position so impregnable and almost inaccessible that it is easy to believe the tradition that it was once a stronghold of robbers, before its mines were discovered and the present stern rule of law and order began in Mexico.

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So Isabel Rivers was thinking, as she sat on a heap of ore in the patio of the Caridad mine and looked at the picture before her. It was a very comprehensive view which her position gave; for the Caridad mine lies in the heights which close the northern end of the valley.

Some one laughed, and she looked around quickly. The Mexicans at work in the patio—men bringing out ore, boys seated in groups on the ground breaking and sorting it—were all before her, and as it was certain that none of them had laughed, so, turning, she glanced upward.

"I heard you spouting Wordsworth," he said, "and I couldn't but laugh to think how much one stands in need of a remoter charm—in Topia."

"Speak for yourself," she returned, "I don't think Topia stands the least in need of a remoter charm. And I wasn't spouting; I was simply thinking aloud, not knowing of any irreverent listener nearby."

"I'm not irreverent," he protested. "My attitude toward both yourself and Wordsworth is reverence itself. But, honestly now, you must admit that, however picturesque it may be, there are a few things lacking here, even though we do sit

present in abeyance, while you are all alive on your artistic side—fascinated by the novelty of the scenes and life around you."

"What would I be made of if I were not fascinated by such scenes? I don't envy the person who could look unmoved on that"—she indicated the wide and wonderful picture before them—"or who would not be interested in the people living under those roofs down there."

"He looked doubtful. 'I grant that one might search the world around and find nothing grander in the way of scenery, if grandeur consists in precipitousness,' he said. 'But for the people—don't you think that human nature is pretty much the same under whatever roofs it exists?'"

"Oh, human nature!" she answered impatiently. "Of course that is the same; in other words, these people love and hate and hope and fear and suffer just as we do. Those things are elemental. But what differentiates human nature are customs, manners, habits, and the mode of expressing elemental feeling. That is what I find interesting under those roofs."

"It's evident that you must find something, else you couldn't give so many hours as you do to these Mexican women, who are to me most uninteresting."

"That is probably because you don't know enough Spanish to talk to them."

"The trouble in our conversations is not want of language, but want of topics. We have, as sentimental people say, 'nothing in common.' In self-defense most men under such circumstances are driven to making love, but that I never do."

"Never?"

"If you are trying to entrap me into a stale quotation, I decline to be entrapped. If you mean to cast doubt on my assertion—why, by Jove!—Lloyd!"

The tall, sunburnt man who had entered the patio with the careless air of one who finds himself in a spot with which he is thoroughly familiar looked quickly around at sound of his name.

"Ah, Thornton!" he said, uncovering at the sight of the figure rising from the ore heap. "Miss Rivers! this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Not an unexpected pleasure to find me in Topia, I hope," she said, smiling; "else you must have forgotten our journey up the quebrada."

"In Topia, not at all," he replied; "but in the patio of the Caridad."

"Oh, Miss Rivers is immensely interested in mining!" Thornton interposed in a low voice. "If she continues on the course she has set out upon, she will soon be qualified to take charge of the Caridad."

"Which simply means," explained the young lady, "that I walk up to the mine every afternoon for the sunset, that I have once or twice been taken into the tunnel, luxuriating in an ore car, and that I have been trying to learn to distinguish the different grades of ore."

erved his former subordinate. "Hello, Lloyd!" he exclaimed, with the extremely tempered cordiality of the Anglo-Saxon. "Where do you come from?"

"From the Sierra, eh? And what have you done with Armistead?" "He is at the meson in Topia. We reached there an hour or two ago; and I left him endeavoring to repair the ravages of several days' hard riding and forest camping, while 'a spirit in my feet' led me up the old path to the Caridad."

"Well, you'll find the mine in pretty good shape. In the San Juan shaft—you remember it?—we've struck splendid ore. You must go in and look at the vein to-morrow. Meanwhile we are just going home. You'd better come with us."

Lloyd being of the same opinion, the group left the patio and strolled over a road which ran along the side of the mountain, with two or three hundred feet of steep descent below it and at least a thousand feet of sheer ascent above, until it turned and took its bowlder-strewn way down into the village. The shadow of the western hills had fallen over the valley, but sunlight still touched with gold the great cliffs cresting the eastern heights.

The exquisite freshness which always comes with the close of the day in Mexico, and especially so in these wonderful Alpine regions, filled the air: forest fragrances were borne from the deep defiles of the hills, and all over the high, mountain-girt valley a charm of remoteness and repose seemed breathed like a spell.

"And so you are just from the Sierra!" Miss Rivers said presently to Lloyd, when her father and Thornton paused to speak to some miners belonging to the night shift whom they met going up to the mine. "I am disposed to envy you. I have such a longing to climb that mountain wall!" she looked up at the great, sunshine-touched escarpments—"and see the wonders that lie beyond!"

"They are really wonders of beauty and grandeur," he assured her; "but the country is so wild and untrodden that only a genuine lover of Nature should venture into it. Any superficial enthusiasm would soon wear off under the discomforts and perils which abound."

"I hope I am a genuine lover of Nature. I have never found my enthusiasm wear off under discomforts and perils. On the contrary, the farther I have gone into any wilderness the happier I have been. I don't think I should prove unworthy of the Sierra."

"Then climb the mountain wall; the Sierra will welcome you. It will give you glades to sleep in that you will feel it a sacrifice to enter; and, having entered, a hard necessity to leave. It will shade your way with the noblest forests you have ever seen; it will lead you through canyons where no ray of sunlight has ever pierced; it will show you views so wide that you will wish for the wings of a dove to fly out over them; and it will give you pictures to carry away so beautiful that you can never forget them; and, thinking of them, your heart will burn with longing to return to the wild, green solitudes, so high, so remote, so free from the presence of man."

"She looked at him, her eyes shining with a light which had not been in them before. "I knew you could talk of the Sierra if you would," she said. "How you love it!"

"And so I believe would you. Therefore I bid you come."

"I will, I am now more than ever determined to do so. Have I told you, by the way, that Dona Victoria, before we parted, asked me to visit her?"

"I congratulate you on a triumph. I am sure that you are the first gringa whom Dona Victoria has ever asked to cross her threshold. And it is a threshold worth crossing. She has built herself a veritable castle—for the Sierra."

"You have seen it?"

"I was there a few weeks ago."

"How interesting! Why did you go? But perhaps I should not ask."

"There is no reason why I should not tell you that I went with Mr. Armistead on business. He had started a moment, then added: 'It was not a business of which I approve, and therefore my part in it was simply that of an interpreter.' Miss Rivers was silent for a moment and glanced over her shoulder to see how far the others were behind, before she said: 'You can't imagine how surprised I was when papa told me, after we reached home, who Dona Victoria is—the daughter of Mr. Trafford of San Francisco.'"

was sent away to these remote mountains because—poor soul!—she was homesick, and in her absence divorced without her knowledge."

"It is perfectly true. And not content with what he already holds, he is trying to obtain more. It is now, or soon will be, a matter of public knowledge that he is claiming the Santa Cruz Mine."

"Why, I have heard papa say that it is the richest mine in the Sierra."

"If you know Mr. Trafford, it is hardly necessary for me to point out that that is reason enough for his claiming it."

"But he is so wealthy—millions upon millions, people say that he has!"

"The appetite for millions grows with their possession, you know. Probably Trafford's wealth is exaggerated. Certainly he has use for it all; and he sees no reason why the woman whom he has thrown out of his life should be enjoying the revenues from even one of her father's mines."

"Oh!" Language was inadequate to express Miss Rivers' sentiments. She clenched her hands into two small white fists. "When I think that I have been in that man's house, that I have walked over his carpets and sat on his chairs and accepted his hospitality, I hate myself," she declared presently, "or at least I feel as if I stood in need of some kind of purification. And will he succeed?—will he get the mine?"

"Not if Dona Victoria can hold it, you may be sure."

"Ah, Dona Victoria! Yes, I am sure she will fight for her own and her mother's rights. What is she going to do?"

"Sit tight, as our British friends would say, on the Santa Cruz. I think there's nothing else for her to do."

"And what is he going to do—Mr. Trafford, I mean?"

"I must refer you to Mr. Armistead for that information. I told him when we left the Calderon hacienda that I would help him no further, either directly or indirectly, in the matter; and so I am not in his confidence."

"You are still with him?"

"In other business. We are taking hold of some mines together."

"Miss Rivers walked on meditatively for a moment. Then she said: 'I must know what he is going to do. I want to put Dona Victoria on her guard.'"

"It is very good of you," said Lloyd with a smile; "but I don't really think that Dona Victoria needs to be put on her guard. She is a wide-awake young woman."

"But they say in California that no man—no trained business man—is wide enough awake to be able to get ahead of Trafford. I've heard that said—and over again. How, then, can a Mexican girl hope to do so? No. We must find out what he is going to do and let her know."

tain restraint. Accepting anything like payment for an errand was entirely contrary to the ethics of her training. But no such qualms troubled John who accepted the package with interested alacrity and the important statement: "Cookies are my favorite food."

"They are mine, too," smiled Jennie as she started to accompany the children to the gate. "And what else do you like, John?"

"Oh, bread and butter—and candy." There was no telling what this very agreeable woman might have in the capacious pocket of her comfortable looking apron.

"John!" exclaimed Margaret, abashed. "John's all right," said Jennie laughing. "And how are father and mother?" she asked.

"Father's sick," answered the boy quickly. "and mother's lonesome; she cried last night."

"Sick! Lonesome!" exclaimed Jennie; and Margaret hastened to explain: "Father's not really sick; he's not very well and that's why we came to the country—the fresh air, you know," she added wisely. "And, of course, mother misses her friends."

"Of course," assented Jennie, with a remorseful twinge. "I must go and see her."

"Margaret's eyes shone. "Please do, Miss Butler," she said eagerly. "I miss my friends, too," she went on with a grown-up air, adding quickly: "But I like the children here ever so much."

"I don't miss mine," remarked John coolly. "Don't you, now?" laughed Jennie. "I wonder why?"

"I didn't have any," was the laconic reply.

"Why, John?" said his sister, "how can you say that? Don't you remember the Martin boys—"

"Huh!" from John. "Lonnie Martin isn't no friend of mine—he took my pigeons away from me and bloodied my nose all up."

"But you were always playing with some one," protested Margaret. "Oh, some of the kids were nice, patronizingly." "But the kids here! Gee! Don't they know how to play the great games though! I tell father all about them and sometimes he plays with 'em. Father—he's the most good as a boy to play with."

"He's a pretty nice father, I expect," said Jennie smiling.

"Yes, I like him," was the unexpected response, whereat Jennie felt compelled to give him a squeeze.

"John, you and I are going to be great friends," she said. "Why don't you give me your cookies. You have to eat them right away," she admonished, "or they'll spoil."

"Oh, no, cookies don't spoil," laughed the boy, thoroughly at home with this grown-up who could joke just like mother. In the meantime Jennie had a sudden inspiration.

was not without hinting that he considered the neighbors might be better employed in looking after their own. Deeply offended, the insulted individual carried the account of the affront to the other neighbors, who unanimously decided that they would indeed mind their own affairs, and likewise leave him and his new tenant, when he got one, severely alone.

Thus the Lynchs, coming from the city for their first experience of country life, and pleasantly anticipative of the open friendliness they were to find there, were unexpectedly thrown back upon themselves by the stolid, not to say chilly, demeanor of the people. That they had known the Blunns was set down in their disfavor. Mr. Lynch, the most kindly and genial of men, found his neighbors strangely unresponsive to his advances; and gentle little Mrs. Lynch, rather lonely in her new environment, waited in vain for the friendly visits which she had heard were a feature of rural life. The children alone encountered no difficulties, the younger element at The Corners being happily unconscious of, or indifferent to, the quiet but none the less determined boycott of the new neighbors. Plain, contented, good living, agreeable and generous in the main, the people never stopped to think how unjust they were in visiting Mrs. Blunn's shortcomings and Mr. Gordon's curious infirmity of temper on the perfectly innocent Lynchs. But with the pertinacity of a somewhat empiric community when it gets an idea into its head, they went calmly on ignoring the new family, who found the surroundings rather bleak and depressing.

"I've always heard that no one can be as unfriendly as country people, when they are unfriendly," said Mrs. Lynch one day, in discussing the unaccountable attitude of the people; "but I never expected to encounter such a pronounced example of it myself," smiling somewhat ruefully.

"Perhaps it's just their way, and they don't mean to be unfriendly," answered her husband.

"Well, anyway," rejoined Mrs. Lynch cheerfully, "the change is helping you and that's the main thing. I can put up with worse things than chilly neighbors just to see you get strong again. And the children certainly do enjoy it. Just look how chubby John is getting!"

"You're a real pearl, Margaret," her husband responded tenderly. "You have the happy faculty of making the best of everything. If these people can resist you very long, they are hopeless," he added laughing.

When the children came running joyfully in on their return from the patio, both together tried to inform their mother of the great delight in store for the next day.

"Helping to make apple-butter! Oh, how fine that will be! And how kind of Miss Butler to ask you! I only wish I could go along, too," with a rather wistful smile.

"Oh, mother, do come!" said Margaret eagerly. "I know Miss Butler would be glad! She said she was coming to see you—and she's awfully nice. She likes John; she laughed at everything he said. And she kissed me, and said I was a little dear—and, oh, she's lovely!" wound up Margaret, somewhat incoherently but with much conviction.

"Oh, yes, mother, do come!" begged John. "You can peel apples. I don't believe," thoughtfully, "that I could peel 'em fast enough."

His mother laughed. "I see you have a job for me. Well, I'll think about it. If I thought Miss Butler really wouldn't mind— Regarding the children with a maternal but discriminating eye, she commented: "Of course you are dainties, and she couldn't help but think so. Maybe, hopefully, 'I can win them, too; with the sad reflection that she, who had in the city such a close and devoted circle of friends should now have to resort to artifice, however innocent, to win any sort of friendliness from these strange undemonstrative people. "But it's for Jack's sake," she defended herself. "And we have to live here for a time. It is curious how they act. There may be some reason—yet what could there be? I believe I'll go with the children in the morning just as an experiment. If I'm snubbed and sent home,—and she laughed aloud, "it won't be any worse than being left entirely alone."

There was a gentle bustle of excitement in the Butler home in the morning. Kit Ann Frizell, Jennie's maid of all work, had been peeling apples since the early breakfast, while Miss Hester had delicately washed up the breakfast dishes, enveloped in a large apron and considerable gloom. For Jennie's anticipations had been realized, and Miss Hester had been decidedly "put out" when told about Jennie's prospective assistants. "You know how I hate children cluttering up the place!" she had said crossly. "And those Lynch youngsters at that! I can't see why you asked them! Putting their noses into everything like the Blunns!"

"They're not the least bit like the Blunns," Jennie hastened to assure her. "They're the sweetest children! So polite and well behaved—"

"Yes! Yes! I've heard all that before!" sourly. "All your gossamer swans! But I give you fair warning that I won't be bothered with them, and if they get in the way I shall send them packing!"

Jennie said nothing, but smiled inwardly, picturing Hester's slow capitulation to the charms of the two children, for though encased in

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TO BE CONTINUED

A CHILLY INTERVAL AT THE CORNERS

Helen Morriarty in Rosary Magazine

There was a knock at the side door. Jennie, who had been dozing over her carpet rags, jumped up with plesed alacrity and hurried out, leaving Miss Hester calmly sorting

"Oh, Miss Butler," said little Margaret Lynch shyly, as Jennie opened the door, "the man at the post office gave us this letter for your sister. He said it would be so late when the carrier got around in the morning and he thought she was anxious to get it."

"And so you brought it," said Jennie, beaming at the two pretty children. "What little dears you are! Come right in—I think maybe I have some cookies here that will taste good after such a long walk."

"No, thank you," from the little girl with bashful primness, "mother will be looking for us." The boy looked disappointed. The cookies appealed to him.

"Mother knew we were coming," he announced with nine-year-old directness. "We had to go home to ask her if we could come."

"Of course," said Jennie, "like the good children that you are. And I'm sure she won't mind if I give you some cookies to eat on the way home. Little boys should always be hungry," she added diplomatically; "and little girls, too," smiling into the flower-like face of small Margaret, who smiled back with a cer-