

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER VII

AN APPEAL

The room into which the two Americans were presently conducted proved to be a large apartment, bare of all furniture except two small, hard beds, one or two chairs, and the most primitive possible lavatory arrangements. But their portmanteaus were on the floor, and Lloyd assured Armistead that such quarters were for the Sierra luxury itself.

In fact, this house astonished me," he said. "I did not think there was anything like it in the Sierra, though I heard in Canelas that Dona Victoria had built a casa grande on the hacienda."

"Dona Victoria seems to be running things altogether according to her own sweet will," Armistead remarked, as having wiped his face on the square of rough toweling provided for this purpose, he made ineffectual efforts to discern his image in a small, green mirror by the light of a single tallow candle.

"But although the house is literally a casa grande, it seems to have only the rudest furnishing."

"Naturally, when everything must be made on the spot, or transported a hundred or two miles on the back of a mule. Besides, those who have never known luxuries don't miss them."

"Luxuries, no—but comfort!"

"Comfort is a relative term, also. This, you may be sure, is a palace in all respects compared to the house in which these people have hitherto lived. But Dona Victoria has been to Cullacua, perhaps even to Larango; she has observed ways of living in those places; and, being a progressive young woman, she has seen no reason for continuing to live in a log house in the Sierra, since sun-baked bricks can be made anywhere."

"I wonder if this progressive young woman is afraid of what her mother may say or do, that she doesn't want her to be seen?"

"I think she simply wants to shield her from pain."

"Pain!" Armistead scoffed. "You can't really believe that she is still suffering from Traford's desertion! The feelings of people closely allied to savages are very elemental and transitory, you know."

"I know that you had better get rid of your idea that these people are in any sense savages, or else keep it very carefully to yourself," Lloyd returned. "You've had a lesson of the imprudence of taking for granted that nobody around you understands English. That young fellow who translated your remark about a room and supper—"

"Confound his impudence!"

"As much as you like, but he was at least good enough to put you on your guard. It will be well to remember that he has been ears, a good comprehension of English, and evidently no love for gringos—especially those who come on such an errand as ours."

"I can imagine nothing of less importance than the opinion of a whippersnapper like that."

"Even whippersnappers have their uses. What Don Arturo is young enough to express, you may be sure that everyone else is feeling."

"I don't care a hang what they are feeling! I am here on Business"—the manner in which Armistead pronounced the name of the great American fetish is very inadequately represented by capitalizing its initial letter,—"and I propose to accomplish what I have come for, if the whole Calderon clan rises up to protest."

"They'll hardly be satisfied with protesting."

"They can do what they like. I suppose the writ of the law runs even in the Sierra?"

"Possibly, but I shouldn't care to be the man who tried to enforce it—at least not in the present case."

"Well, I shall not hesitate a moment to enforce it, if I find such enforcement necessary—isn't that a knock at the door? Supper? Good? I'm more than ready for it."

When they entered from their apartment they saw that a table, in a corner of the corridor where a lamp was hanging, had been laid for two. Don Mariano, who was seated on a bench near by, rose to invite them ceremoniously to their places, but did not join them.

day? Twelve thousand feet? Not strange that one shivers at that height night—without fire, too! I'd like to build a rousing blaze in the middle of this patio. Since that can't be done, I'm off! Buenas noches, señor!"

Observing that Don Mariano was also yawning, and knowing the early hours kept on haciendas—where the day for all begins at or before the breaking of light,—Lloyd likewise said good-night, but he did not follow Armistead to his refuge of bed and blankets. On the contrary, having seen both that gentleman and Don Mariano disappear, he filled his brier with a fresh charge of short cut, and, plunging his hands in his pockets, walked out of the great front door of the house, on the threshold of which a moco, wrapped in his eyes in his blankets, crouched half asleep.

Wonderful was the beauty of the night which met him as he stepped outside,—wonderful and full of an unappreciated and dark gorgeous splendor. The moon, late in rising, had not yet appeared over the eastern heights; but the starlight of these high regions has a radiance so bright that every feature of the landscape, every fold of the distant hills, could be clearly discerned. Steeped in repose, the lovely valley stretched to the feet of the mountains which surrounded it, from craggy outcrops against the star-strewn sky, their serene and mighty steadfastness emblematic beyond all else on earth.

that eternal rest We can not compass in our speech

And it was not only the picture spread before the eye which conveyed this impression. Lloyd thought of the deep, majestic woods, the lowering heights and dark gorges spreading for hundreds of leagues around this spot, and through and over which whoever sought it must pass. The air was filled with resinous, aromatic odors from the breathing earth, the vast encircling forests; and the only sound which broke the stillness was the music of flowing water, the song which the stream was singing to the night and the stars as it flowed along the crests of the hills.

"Senior!"

Lloyd started and turned sharply. Unheard, Victoria had come to his side, and stood looking at him with her eyes full of an expression which for the first time struck him as wistful and appealing.

"Seniorita!" he responded quickly, taking his pipe from his lips. "I saw you go out," she said simply; "and as I watched you standing here alone it seemed as if you were waiting for some one, and so it occurred to me to come and ask if you will help me a little."

"Nothing could give me more pleasure than to help you in any way," he answered. And indeed the sympathy which he had felt for her from the first was now quickened to a chivalric desire to assist her in the fight which was before her unless she yielded to the demand about to be made; and no one could look at Victoria and imagine that she would tamely yield anything.

"I thought it possible that you would," she said; "because I remember that when I talked to you at Guasmilane and again at Canelas, you seemed different from others who come into our country. You seemed to feel, to understand things almost as we feel and understand them."

"I have tried to do so," he assented.

"And therefore," she went on, "you may be willing to tell me what it is that the señor, your friend, wishes to say to my mother."

The liquid, brilliant eyes uplifted to him in the starlight were now almost beseeching; but Lloyd found himself somewhat taken aback by the form in which his assistance was asked.

"Seniorita," he said again—then hesitated—do you not think it would be better to let my friend speak for himself?"

"Your friend has refused to answer my question once," she said, "and I shall not ask him again. But I thought that you might understand that what I wish to do is to shield my mother—to know whether or not it is necessary for you to see this man."

"She does not wish to see him?"

Lloyd was conscious of the folly of the question as he asked it.

"Senior!" There was a flash in the liquid softness of the eyes. "Could she wish to see him? But she will do whatever I say, and I thought you might help me to decide—"

"And so will," said Lloyd, with sudden determination. "There is no reason why you should not be told what concerns you so much. You know that Mr. Armistead has come here as the agent of—"

"Mr. Traford," she said, as he paused. "Yes, I know that. But for what object does he come?"

To assert Mr. Traford's claim of ownership over the Santa Cruz Mine," Lloyd answered concisely.

"Ah!" she caught her breath sharply, and again the starlight showed a flash of fire in the dark eyes. "He will dare? But the Santa Cruz Mine is my mother's; she inherited it from her father; and it had been abandoned for years, when we reopened it, worked it, made it what it is to-day. What claim has Mr. Traford upon it?"

and San Fernando Mines. The Santa Cruz he shall never touch."

"I hope that you can hold it against him," said Lloyd; "but I am afraid you must prepare for a fight."

"She lifted her head with the air of one who accepts a challenge."

"We will fight," she said; "and the brief words expressed much."

"Well, that is all," Lloyd added after a moment. "So now you can prepare your mother, and you can decide whether or not she should see Mr. Armistead to-morrow."

"Victoria brought her brows together in the straight, resolute line with which he—as already so familiar. For the first time she looked away from him, out over the starlit valley to the solemn encircling heights; and there was a pause in which he heard again the song of the stream. It lasted only a moment. Then the girl turned her gaze back to meet his.

"I have decided," she said. "It will be best that she should see him."

"I think so," Lloyd answered, struck by the quickness of her decision. "There can then be no doubt that the answer given is her own."

"It is not that only," Victoria said. "It is that she has a right to speak for herself and to tell that man—"

"Dona Beatriz bowed with a manner full of dignity."

"I am ready to hear whatever the señor has come to say to me," she answered.

"Then tell her," said Armistead, making a strong grip upon his most business like manner, "that I have come to remind her that the Santa Cruz Mine is the property of Mr. Traford, and to inform her that he intends to assert his rights of ownership over it."

A moment's pause followed the repetition of these words. Don Mariano uttered a quick ejaculation, but Victoria's hand on his arm silenced him; and it was Dona Beatriz who again spoke, quietly.

"The Santa Cruz Mine belongs to me, senior; and I do not recognize that Mr. Traford has any rights of ownership over it."

"Remind her that the mine was given to him by her father," Armistead replied.

"Other things were also given him by my father, senior," she answered. "Some of these he has kept to his own profit; some he has thrown away. There was another pause, fraught with significance, and then the full, sweet tones went on.

"Whether he intended to keep or to throw away the Santa Cruz Mine does not matter. It is mine and I shall keep it."

"Tell her that she can't hold it!" said Armistead, impatiently. "Traford has a title to it which the law will sustain."

"We have paid the taxes on the mine," Don Mariano interposed before Dona Beatriz could answer this. "It does not matter who paid them, senior, as long as they were paid." Lloyd replied for himself. "You must know this."

"No," she said, "I have paid them in the name of Dona Beatriz Calderon, Senior."

"I doubt if that would stand against Mr. Traford's title, senior; especially since the—ah—tie between Dona Beatriz and himself remains unannulled in Mexico."

"Don Mariano's face fell."

"It is true," he said. "We did not think of that. We should have let the little lapse and denounced the mine. But who could have anticipated the audacity—the shamelessness—of such a claim?"

Lloyd shrugged his shoulders. "It seems to me that you might have anticipated it," he said.

She acknowledged the salutations of the two men with the usual murmured formulas of politeness; and then, inviting them to be seated with a wave of her hand, sat down herself. Victoria, who had not opened her lips, but merely looked to them silently, sat down beside her; Don Mariano seated himself a little in the rear, having already explained that Dona Beatriz had requested him to be present at the interview.

There was an expectant pause; and Lloyd, glancing at Armistead, had a sense of satisfaction in recognizing that the latter was at last conscious of the awkwardness of the situation.

"I almost wish that I had stayed in Canelas and sent a letter," he muttered. "Confound it, Lloyd! You'll have to explain the matter."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," Lloyd returned. "I am here to translate whatever you wish to say, but I haven't a single word to say for myself."

"You're extremely disobliging, I must say! Well, tell Dona Beatriz that I have been sent here by—"

"Mr. Traford to see her with regard to—"

"—a matter of business."

"She has heard that before, but I'll tell her to her again." And, turning to Dona Beatriz, Lloyd repeated the words in Spanish.

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"I am ready to hear whatever the señor has come to say to me," she answered.

justice, and he shall have none of it." She rose to her feet—a superb figure in her noble beauty, her righteous indignation. "I swear it!" she said. "Do you hear, senior? I swear it by the holy cross that stands over the mine! Neither he nor any one whom he sends shall ever enter the Santa Cruz."

"I suppose there is nothing for me to say in reply, except that I will communicate with Mr. Traford," Armistead observed when these words were repeated to him. "What steps he will direct me to take I don't know, but I do know that he's not likely to yield his claim. I am sorry that they are going to put up a fight, but I suppose it was to be expected. Tell Dona Beatriz that I regret extremely to have had to annoy her with this demand, but that I am only acting as Mr. Traford's agent in the business."

"Dona Beatriz replies that she is aware of that," Lloyd reported a moment later, "and adds that she hopes you will remain at La Joyas as long as it may please you to do so."

"She is exceedingly kind, but I think you had better say that we will leave immediately. We haven't any excuse for remaining longer, since I suppose they wouldn't let us see the mine."

"I certainly wouldn't advise you to ask to do so. There is a limit even to Mexican courtesy."

"Then say all the complimentary things that are in order, and let us bid them good-bye and get off."

The complimentary things having been duly said in stately Castilian, and responded to by Dona Beatriz with a dignity and grace which would not have misbecome a royal personage, Lloyd found himself looking into Victoria's eyes, which met his own with a very friendly glance, as she held out her hand in farewell.

"Adios, senior!" she said. "I shall not forget the service you did me."

"If I can serve you again, will you remember that I am at your command?" he asked.

"She looked surprised."

"But you are with him!" and she glanced at Armistead.

"In this matter no longer than we leave your gates. In fact, I have never been with him further than merely to serve as his interpreter; but I shall not bear even that part in any steps which he may take against us."

"In any steps which he may take against us we can defend ourselves," she said proudly.

"Yet a friend is not to be despised," Lloyd urged, a little to his own surprise; for why, he asked himself, should he wish to impress her with the reality of a friendship which after today could mean so little to her?"

"A friend is never to be despised, senior," she answered hastily; for those around were looking at them with some surprise. Then, with another murmured "Adios!" she turned away with her mother.

And so a little later they took their departure from La Joyas.

TO BE CONTINUED

A MISSIONARY AT HEART

Mary Clark Jacobs in Rosary Magazine

Father Frazer was absorbed in the preparation of his sermon for the following Sunday. The pastor of St. John's Church was ill and this young man, but recently ordained to the priesthood, had come to fill his place until his recovery. But try as hard as he might the thoughts would not come. While he paced the length of the room with a quick, nervous tread the doorbell rang, followed quickly by the little electric buzzer over his door, which was Mrs. Mallory's method of informing him that a visitor awaited him.

"Hello, my poor sermon!" the young priest sighed as he descended the stairs.

At the entrance to the reception room he paused. Evidently unaware of his approach, a man was standing with his back towards the door, greatly interested in a picture of the Sacred Heart.

"He is not a Catholic," was Father Frazer's inward comment. "Good-morning, sir," he called aloud.

"Ah! Good morning," the man turned from his inspection of the picture. "You are Father?"

correctly?—for his soul and that it would be better even than prayers."

"Yes," said the priest, "Catholics always pray and have Masses said for their departed brethren, and we firmly believe that they are greatly benefited thereby."

"And you will say this Mass?"

"I shall be very glad, indeed, to do so. Have you any particular date in mind or shall I say it as soon as possible?" Father Frazer reached for the record.

"He will be dead a year the twentieth of this month."

"On that day, then, I will offer an anniversary Requiem High Mass for the repose of his soul. The name please."

"Jimjim is the only one I can give you, Father. I cannot remember his real name, and could not pronounce it if I did. Jimjim was a poor illiterate hunchback."

"Jimjim," mused the priest, as he wrote the name in the book. "Rather queer, isn't it?"

"If you have time to listen, Father, I would be glad to tell you the story; but if duty calls you elsewhere please do not hesitate to say so."

"You have aroused my curiosity, and I would like to hear the story."

"After leaving college," his visitor began, "I secured a position with a big construction company on the Coast, and it was part of my work to register the foreign laborers as they came in, herded together like cattle, hundreds at a time. It was no easy task, I assure you. One day after finishing an impossible jumble of X's and Z's I waved the fellow impatiently aside to make way for the next one. Then my eyes fell upon the little hunchback. His monstrous head and ugly, grinning face barely reached my desk, the small, misshapen body lurched sideways, and the long, thin arms hung limp and loose, with skinny, claw-like fingers almost touching the ground; and then I saw his eyes—gleaming, expressive, black eyes that burned with the fire of a big human heart within."

"Starting a kindergarten? I asked of Jack, whose father was the highest authority in the camp."

"He came in with the bunch and dad says to let him stay."

"With Jack's assistance as interpreter we managed to get his name, which I verily believe took the whole alphabet, three times over, and two lines of the ledger."

"Good-bye, Jimjim," I cried, as he moved away and the next man took his place. 'What you lack in size is made up in name, all right!' And after that, he was 'Jimjim' to all of us."

"As the little fellow moved towards the door, MacGawn entered. MacGawn was the foreman, big, brawny and powerful; his voice roared through the wilderness like a cannon, and the one that disobeyed his commands knew that he courted death."

"Hum! So we're getting monkeys into the camp now, are we? It's pretty low specimens of humanity I've been getting lately, but I'll not stand for apes! And, rising on his big feet, he deliberately kicked the dwarf out of the office, washing him as he landed in a ditch five feet away."

"When Jimjim appeared with the men next morning to be assigned to work, his wrath boiled over again."

"If you don't keep that baboon out of my way, I'll kill him. I have enough trouble without 'tending a zoo!' So Jack sent him over to me."

"Use the poor fellow to run errands, clean up, or anything you like. I believe dad would fire that hot-headed Scotchman if there were another man this side of the Atlantic who could manage the men as well."

And from that moment Jimjim became my devoted slave. I managed to keep him out of MacGawn's way, saw that he got enough to eat and a place to bury, and in gratitude the little chap couldn't do enough for me. He followed me around like a dog, anticipating my wishes in a really uncanny manner. With Jack's assistance I taught him a jargon of words, and we were soon able to understand each other, with the aid of signs. He called me 'Beel,' for Bill. Whenever I had nothing in particular for him to do, he would steal away to the big steam engine, and at a safe distance, his black eyes bulging with terror and amazement, watch it. I found him there one day when the men were filling the tank with water.

"Hello, Jimjim," I cried. "Some big drinker, huh?"

"Biga drinka," he repeated after me, shaking his head.

"Sure," I laughed. "If the men did not give the engine water, every day, it would explode and kill all of us."

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